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MADONNA
OF
THE SLATE
and Other Short Stories

LABAN LACY RICE



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THE MADONNA OF THE SLATE
AND
OTHER SHORT STORIES

By

LABAN LACY RICE

*Author of "A MOUNTAIN IDYLL" and
"SONNETS TO B. B. R."*



NASHVILLE
THE BAIRD-WARD PRESS
1923

TO
MY DAUGHTERS:

KATHARINE SHAW
ANNIE HAYS O'NEIL

PS
3535
I 226
M 63
5622



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THE MADONNA OF THE SLATE

I had heard that she was "beautiful," "lovely as a houri," yet withal I did not expect to find a face so purely angelic. She sat expectant, her hands loosely clasped and resting on a table covered with dark green cloth. About her head and shoulders she had draped in conventional madonna fashion a costly oriental shawl. As she lifted her eyes and welcomed me quietly to a seat near the table I recalled instantly Defregger's superb "Madonna With The Christ Child."

No wonder she was doing a thriving business. It was well worth any man's two dollars to sit for an hour opposite that lovely face and gaze into eyes that had the lustre of a summer morn. Could one so radiant in features, so seraphic, I questioned inwardly, be a vulgar cheat? Could a being so sweetly suggestive of things heavenly belie her true self, palming off on sorrow-stricken hearts spurious messages from the beloved dead?

As she talked calmly of the comfort she had brought to those who mourned, my nature rose

in revolt against the charge of imposture. "She must be," I breathed to myself, "an authentic witness, a genuine interpreter between us and the spirits of the departed."

The longer I studied her face the more composite seemed its extraordinary beauty. Once when she smiled I thought of Dagnan-Bouveret's lovely madonna. At times when she looked straight into my eyes, her lips immobile, I was transported to the Pitti Gallery in front of Murillo's glorious "Mother and Child." Often she drooped her lids and gently inclined her head as if looking intently at something on the table, reminding me strongly of Bougoureau's brilliant canvas, "Our Lady Of The Angels." And yet, the heavy drapery about her head, the dark hair parted in the middle, the thin, delicately drawn nose, perfect mouth and lustrous, dreamy eyes, kept constantly before me Defregger's exquisite masterpiece.

I have already admitted that her loveliness stifled my skepticism. Accordingly, I entered into the seance eager to be convinced that discarnate spirits sometimes transmit their messages to the living by so prosaic a means as that of

slate writing. Readily divining that I was thoroughly receptive, she took the initiative and proceeded to mystify me, and thus make captive my belief, by revealing on slates that I had sponged with my own hands brief, definite messages purporting to emanate from friends in the spirit realm. The phenomena were astounding, yet I could not help wondering why those friendly spirits, at that particular time, should unite in sending me "comforting" messages when I was in no need of such. Somehow a momentary doubt, painful to my smug acquiescence in the medium's honesty, took violent hold of me, and on impulse I decided to test her veracity.

Alas, for my beautiful illusions, my unsophisticated confidence in mere loveliness! Within the next half hour I read on various slates a dozen so-called "comforting messages" recorded by the "spirit" fingers of a supposedly deceased mother, brother and aunt, all of whom to a moral certainty I knew were alive at that moment. The shock to my self-complacency was terrible. Still I managed somehow—doubtless out of respect for her beauty—to suppress my utter disgust and to leave the radiant madonna of the slate un-

der the soothing conviction that her string of fools was lengthening.

A night or two later I dropped in at Blondel's and recounted my nauseating experience. Blondel, astride of his favorite chair in front of an open grate, listened with amused interest, occasionally punctuating my remarks with a suggestive chuckle not very pleasing to my vanity.

"You seem to be amused," I remarked testily.

"And don't you think the experience justifies?" he replied, laughingly.

Disarmed by his thorough good nature, I softened and tried to smile also—but, I fear in a sickly guise. To hide my chagrin I asked bluntly if he knew how the medium put those "messages" on the slate.

"Certainly," he answered, without hesitation.

"Convince me then," I demanded, with a warmth that bespoke a challenge.

"Not tonight—some other night, gladly," he replied, taking out his watch. "I have an engagement at eight and it now lacks five minutes of the hour."

"If that's the case I'd better be leaving," and I reached for my hat.

"No, stay if you like; in fact, I think you will be really interested in the interview."

"But the other fellow?"

"Oh, never mind—I'll fix that readily."

Glad of the opportunity to satisfy my aroused curiosity I put down my hat and we chatted about spiritualism till the bell rang.

When Blondel returned he was accompanied by a man whom I knew well at sight. He was the junior member of the great brokerage firm of Tillett and Robinson. Formalities over, and explanation of my presence accepted, the junior member at once stated the object of his visit.

"Mr. Tillett, senior member of our firm, recently has fallen into the clutches of a set of rascals who, I am convinced, are scheming to wreck us. As we do a volume of business reaching annually into the millions, and, as my entire capital is invested in the enterprise, you can easily gauge my solicitude. This clique is operating mainly through the agency of a very beautiful Italian medium, Madame Neri——."

Blondel and I exchanged significant glances.

"——who possesses exceptional skill, claims an uncanny knowledge of the future and makes

a specialty of giving expert advice to business men. This fascinating woman has obtained a vicious influence over my colleague through the latter's wife, who, some three months ago, lost an only child and for the past five or six weeks has been visiting the medium regularly, often of late, accompanied by her husband."

"You are quite sure of all this?"

"Yes; for the past month I have had in my employ a detective who has registered every visit."

"And have you spotted the gang that is plotting against you?"

"Without a doubt—it is the rival firm of Proctor and Duluth."

"Has this firm any motive in view other than that of mere gain?"

"I am afraid so. Mr. Tillett and Duluth are old enemies. Years ago in a grain deal he came near ruining Duluth, and I believe the latter with vengeance in mind has been biding his time to get even."

"Which complicates a situation already ugly enough."

The junior member nodded regretful assent.

"How long has Mr. Tillett, when alone, been visiting this Madame Neri?"

"At least four weeks—perhaps longer."

"How many times to date has she specifically—so far as you have determined—advised him to buy or sell?"

"Five."

"Am I correct in assuming that your partner was pleased with results in each instance?"

"Yes."

"And that the transactions thus far have involved no very large sum?"

"They have not."

"Were they sales or purchases?"

"Three were purchases, and my belief is that Duluth let go the stock—and at considerable loss—in order to strengthen my partner's faith in the medium's supposedly supra-natural knowledge."

"Quite probable, Mr. Robinson, in fact, I think we may conclude that Duluth is baiting your partner, cautiously laying his plans for a grand coup that will involve your firm in ruinous obligations."

"You express my fears exactly."

"Have you ventured to discuss these fears with your partner?"

"Yes, indeed, to the fullest extent our close relationship warranted. Mr. Tillett is arbitrary, a bit supercilious and considerably older in years and experience, hence impatient of anything that smacks of dictation from me. He laughs at my fears, gets furious when I impugn Madame Neri's honesty, and annihilates my arguments by pointing with contemptuous pride to his successful ventures."

"But have you specifically dwelt on the possibility that through the medium he is being baited by Duluth?"

"Yes, and in anger have dared to tell him that if he continues to follow this siren's advice he will ruin us both."

"Then why not dissolve partnership?"

"For several reasons I shrink from this. I am under great obligations to him; we have made a great deal of money and, barring fatalities, should make even more in the next few years. Further, at this time I can not leave honorably without serious personal embarrassment and loss of financial prestige. Above all, I really

want to save him from disgrace, if not ruin, for he is aging fast and could not weather a serious disaster. However, after long deliberation I have decided to dissolve partnership and face as best I can the embarrassment it will entail if within the next two weeks I can not disillusion him. I am at my wit's end, Mr. Blondel, and on the advice of a friend come to you. If you can forestall impending disaster you will win my everlasting gratitude—and, of course, you can set your price for the service."

"Thank you—but I never accept remuneration in such cases. A modest income enables me to play the psychic game for the sheer love of it."

"Then, I may count on your assistance?"

"Certainly—but a few more questions. Have you thought of offering a bribe to this Madame Neri?"

"Yes, I called to see her last week and frankly stated my mission. When I asserted my belief that she was in Duluth's employ she waxed furious and ordered me from the room. I declined to go, pressed my point sharply, and offered her a certified check for \$5,000 if she would sign a written agreement to grant my partner no fur-

ther sittings. With consummately feigned righteous scorn she rejected the bribe, then bursting into tears requested me, 'a mean, hateful skeptic,' to leave her house immediately and cease interfering with her 'noble work' of comforting bereaved hearts and giving 'supernaturally revealed' advice to one who had befriended her."

"All of which proves that she is playing for very high stakes."

"To be sure, and unless we can outwit her soon, I am confident she will win."

Blondel was silent for a moment, his eyes on the floor. Looking up he asked with a tinge of doubt:

"Do you think you could persuade Mr. Tillett to come with you for an interview Thursday night?"

"I will demand this of him—if necessary as the price of our partnership. You may expect us."

"Well, suppose we meet here at 8 P. M. Meanwhile I will call on this lovely adventuress and study her methods. By the way, you have not dismissed the detective?"

"Certainly not."

"Does he know the ins and outs of the Exchange?"

"Like a primer."

"Then request him to keep a sharp eye on the movements of your rivals. We shall need every scrap of information he can pick up, especially if I find it impossible to convince your partner that he is being duped."

"I will follow your instructions faithfully," he promised with warmth, as he took leave.

"A surprising situation, Blondel," I remarked, as the door closed.

"Not in the least; in fact, you'd be astonished to know how many business and professional men have the habit of consulting mediums about the conduct of their secular affairs."

"But the scheme itself—is it not rather out of the ordinary?"

"Of course, on such a scale. It isn't often that time and circumstance so fitly conspire to breed colossal dupery such as this. However, when gamblers by profession play for big stakes they are quite willing, you know, to hazard a fortune on one turn of the wheel."

"This Mr. Tillett is just what his partner sized

him up. I have known him for years, and if he takes a stubborn streak or conceives a personal dislike of you, it will be useless to try to shake his faith in the enchantress. Keep me posted, will you? I'm certainly interested in the outcome," and I said goodnight.

The following afternoon Blondel, by appointment, had a sitting with the medium, and, pretending to be a novice, allowed himself to be imposed on scandalously, the better to discover the fair deceiver's varied assortment of tricks. She regaled him with all sorts of so-called "spirit" messages from supposedly dead friends and relatives, and incidently gave him one or two tips about purchasing bonds, the alleged advice having been vouchsafed by the spirit of his deceased father, who, by the way, was a university professor of physics and knew next to nothing about such matters.

Thursday evening when, a few minutes ahead of the schedule, I reached Blondel's apartments I found him astride of his chair, with his chin snugly resting on his folded arms. His amusing experience of the preceding day was scarcely re-

counted when the porter ushered in the two partners.

"Gentlemen," our host remarked, after the customary formalities, "we are here by appointment to discuss matters of vital importance. I take for granted, sir," turning toward the senior member, "that your partner has acquainted you with the object of this meeting."

"He has."

"In that event I shall waste no time in explanations. The situation we face is this: you and your partner are approaching a crisis in your dual relationship. He believes, after thorough investigation, that you are being duped by a rival firm, whose object is your ruin. The bait used is that which catches so many artless mortals, namely, supposedly supra-natural advice communicated through some medium. On the contrary, you believe the medium is sincere, and that her revelations are genuine, hence trustworthy. You cite as evidence amounting to truth itself the consoling messages that have come to your wife, in particular, and stand squarely on the undoubted facts that the few financial transactions consummated to date by direction of the

medium have proved uniformly satisfying. Have I stated the issue fairly?"

"You have," both answered in unison.

"Now, as one of you must be in error, it becomes my duty to try to determine to the satisfaction of both, which is right. While I dare not assert that supra-natural phenomena can not be evoked by slate-writing process, I do assert that after twenty-five years of investigation it is my conviction that mediums who commonly resort to the use of slates are frauds. However, I assume that you will demand stronger evidence than my word before relinquishing faith in this Madame Neri."

"Frankly, yes; I must have indubitable evidence before I can be convinced that she is a fraud."

"Very well; but suppose here in this room with the slates you see yonder on the table, I duplicate practically every message she gave you, and, in addition, furnish you alleged spirit quotations on the buying and selling of stocks and bonds, will you then admit that in all human likelihood the lovely madonna of the slate is an

arch hypocrite and deceiver, a fit tool for the devilish designs of your rivals?"

"If you can do this, or even the half, I shall confess myself an arrant fool, but——"

"Good! I can ask nothing further. Let us get down to business. Bailey, will you and Mr. Robinson take seats on the couch; and you, Mr. Tillett, sit opposite me at the table?"

We readily complied, after which Blondel pressed a button. The lights disappeared—all save a tiny glow that came from a bulb over the table covered with a green cloth.

"Gentlemen, I ask you whether the light here is dimmer than that in Madame Neri's room?" Blondel questioned fairly. All three agreed that it was not. Picking up one of the slates, apparently at random, Blondel handed it to the senior partner for inspection. He examined it minutely on both sides and reported it without a scratch or writing. Blondel then handed him a wet sponge and asked him to make sure that no writing was left. The vigorous physical response proved that the gentleman was deeply interested in the evening's ordeal.

Next Blondel took the slate, laid it on the

table, took his seat facing Mr. Tillett and announced that he would call up the spirits. In a short while raps were heard, then the noise made by a pencil grating on a slate. After the lapse of a minute he lifted the slate and handed it to the senior member for inspection.

Taking it eagerly, he gave a quick glance, then looking shamefacedly at Blondel, blurted out, as he threw the slate on the table, "Well, I'll be hanged!"

Instantly the junior partner stepped forward, picked up the slate and read aloud:

"HOCUS-POCUS MUMBO-JUMBO FIDDLE-DE-DEE AND TWEEDLE-DUM

"YOU'VE BEEN STUNG BY MADAME NERI.
WHEN SHE CALLS NO SPIRITS COME."

"Rather irreverent spirit, that," remarked Blondel, smiling.

"But how did you do it?" questioned the senior member in amazement. "I cleaned the slate myself and never took my eyes off it afterward, and I would swear under oath that after you laid

it on the table you never touched it till you picked it up and handed it to me!"

"All of which is true, yet there is the 'spirit' message and, I believe, authentic as any Madame Neri vouchsafed you."

"It seems so," was the sheepish reply.

"Of course, you are eager to see how completely you are fooled? But wait a moment, let's see if the spirit will not be obliging enough to erase the message and then by request reproduce it for us quickly—Presto!" and he laid the slate, writing on under side, near the edge of the table and tapped it gently three times.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

An answering knock was heard, so taking up the slate he handed it to the puzzled partner. The writing had disappeared.

"And now," Blondel remarked, taking the slate out of listless fingers, "the spirit will please be kind enough once more to reproduce the message."

Shortly came a second answering knock.

"One, two, three," Blondel counted slowly, then lifted the slate and handed it across the table without a word. Mr. Tillett reached forward

with his right hand, glanced quickly at the slate then sputtered, "The identical words, I'll be damned!"

"And now, gentlemen, the explanation of this deceptive but none-the-less simple trick," remarked Blondel, standing, as we gathered near the table. "I have used what the trick specialists call the flap slate. This one, as you perceive, is provided with a slate colored flap, one side of which is covered with green cloth matching that on the table. The flap fits snugly into the frame, and after gentle pressure may easily be kept in place. Of course, I wrote the message on the flap before your arrival and laid it on the table green side up, where it is practically invisible in the dim light. After you had cleaned the slate all I had to do was lay it over the flap, go through the usual rigmarole of calling up the spirits, quietly take it off the table, and before handing to you artfully push the flap in place. The rest of the trick is easily comprehended, I suppose."

"Yes, quite so," replied the senior member with disgust, falling back on his chair.

"But how did you make the scratching noise?" queried the junior partner.

"Merely by rubbing together these two bits of pencil, which I had ready for the occasion Fakirs use various devices, some rather complicated, to reproduce the sound; but as you did not watch my hands very closely, I used the simplest of methods."

"It is the devil's own cute coinage," ventured the senior member in disgust.

"Perhaps you would like to have the spirits give you an answer to a sealed question; or maybe you would like a sample of the manner in which spirits can add in a twinkling complex columns of figures; or probably a stock-quotation from the discarnate spirit of your great aunt? If not these, doubtless some exhibitions of pencil materialization may prove racy, otherwise how would you like to have the spirits photograph one of——"

"Enough, for God's sake!" protested the senior member vehemently. "Already I feel like a long-eared ass! Shade of Macchiavelli, how that lovely, saint-like creature strung me! I'd give a cool ten thousand to get even with her and that damned set of scoundrels!" and he gnashed his

teeth in rage and struck the table with tightly clenched fist.

"That's rather easy," remarked Blondel, "still I advise against the attempt, Mr. Tillett."

"Easy, you say?" roared the latter, still in a rage. "Tell me how to outwit this Circe and to beat Duluth at his devilish game and I'll make you a present of a hundred shares of Union Pacific."

"Thank you, but I am not a dealer in stocks and bonds. I shall feel amply repaid if by what has happened tonight an honest man is snatched from the clutches of an unscrupulous gang."

"But," pressed the senior partner with unabated spirit, "you say it is easy to turn the trick on these scheming rascals?"

"Yes, if you can play the game skillfully; still, as there are several unknown factors to be considered, any one of which might, if botched, prove disastrous, I advise you, sir, against thought of revenge."

"But revenge is sweet, you know, and in the present case would be ten-fold more so. By heavens, if you'll only tell me how, I'll risk it, Mr. Blondel!" he concluded, with savage deter-

mination, again pounding the table with clenched fist.

"Very well, if you insist," quietly remarked Blondel, sitting down. "Spurious mediums, Mr. Tillett, are the most astute of crooks so long as they are not sure of their victims. Long practice and the assurance of large returns have made most of them so nearly perfect in the manipulation of their humbuggery that none but expert investigators can detect signs of fraud or hope _____,"

"Are there really any honest mediums, Mr. Blondel?" he bluntly interrupted, skepticism now being rampant.

"Of course, sir; but a medium with genuine psychic power seldom, if ever, stoops to the level of this serpentine beauty, Madame Neri. Mere sleight of hand artists masquerading as mediums when once sure of their quarry are prone to relax their vigilance as if in contemptuous disregard of detection. I am hoping that the bewitching Italian will prove no exception, hence—if you still thirst for vengeance—I suggest that you keep your wife in ignorance of what has occurred tonight, while you continue your visits, playing

artfully the role of dupe, allay all suspicion and watch sharply for the big coup. Unless I miss my guess, not many days will pass before the medium will vouchsafe further 'spirit' advice relative to the purchase or non-purchase of some stock on a scale hitherto unapproached. With accentuation this will doubtless be repeated at one or two subsequent sittings. Express your profuse gratitude and promise to pay her handsomely out of the money you hope to rake in by the transaction. Duluth will likely tempt you with undesirable stock on the strength of the Madame's report that you are credulous. Of course, she will assure you on supra-normal testimony that the stock, which probably today is below par, will shortly take a decidedly bullish turn and that it will be a wonderful 'buy.' To cut matters short, when the stock is offered, decline to purchase and thereby throw consternation into the enemies' ranks.

"Great stuff!" cried the senior member, gleefully rubbing his hands, "guess I'll play a cute little game myself, foxy Duluth!"

"And I," added the junior partner, "feel under vast obligations to you, Mr. Blondel."

Blondel bowed in acknowledgment and as he led the way to the door remarked:

"Watch what you do, gentlemen, for I dare say you are being watched, and, of course, keep me informed."

When Blondel was once more astride of his split-bottomed chair we discussed for an hour or more the events of the evening, particularly the issue of the counter scheme. Blondel had his doubts, while I was optimistic because of the great plausibility of his suggestions and for the reason that I still smarted under the memory of my recent experience and burned to see the discomfiture of a creature so lovely and yet so false. Thus we parted for the night.

The following week, through direct communication with Blondel, I learned that the senior member was faithfully carrying out his agreement. Then came the information that Proctor-Duluth several months previously had purchased below par one hundred thousand shares of Consolidated Copper, which recently they had been trying in vain to sell. The conclusion, therefore, seemed that this was the bait to be used and that the crisis was near.

Urgent business called me to Boston, where I was detained for six days. Shortly after my return I went to Blondel's apartment and found him pacing the floor with long, measured strides. In answer to my greeting he merely nodded his head and pointed to a chair. I sat down and waited for him to speak. The measured strides were reeled off with mechanical regularity—six across the room and six back. At length, fearful that in my absence something dreadful had happened, I asked, ruefully:

“Any bad news about your sister?”

A shake of the head.

“Your father ill?”

Another shake, as he wheeled about.

“Bank failed?”

Silence—his back turned.

“Suffering with toothache?”

A third shake of the head.

“Are you sick, old man?”

“No, Bailey . . . yes, I am—sick at heart. Have you read the Evening News?”

“No, I just got in about an hour ago.”

“Then read this,” and snatching up a crum-

pled paper he tossed it to me and resumed his measured strides.

Taking the wrinkled sheets I smoothed them as best I could and hurriedly glanced at the front page.

"What a solar plexus jab . . . and by a pretty woman! . . . Lord, but she's a foxy vixen!"

"What she?" I asked, still thumbing unavailingly the paper.

"Why, your beautiful madonna of the slate—who else?" he ripped out quickly.

"Well, what has she got to do with this solar plexus business—she isn't a long-range, absent-treatment artist, is she?"

"Rather think she must be from the way I feel," he replied, wearily.

"Riddles, old man—explain yourself," I demanded impatiently.

"Riddles, did you say? Well she's a riddle for you all right!—the pretty, simpering Dago!" and he clenched both hands as if he would like to have them about her beautiful neck.

"What do you want me to read in this paper, Blondel? I requested summarily.

"Bailey," he asked suddenly, wheeling about

and indifferent to my question, "you remember that conference with the junior and senior partners?"

"Of course."

"And the plan I outlined for outwitting the gang of thieves?"

"Certainly."

"Well, it seems this foreign minx, this angelic-faced siren, spotted me the afternoon I called on her. The gang she is in cahoots with evidently had a detective who shadowed the movements of the partners the evening they came to my apartment. Suspicious that I would disillusion the senior partner and help him set a trap, they must have warned the medium, who shortly perceived that Tillett was shamming. Thereupon the slick scoundrels reversed their scheme and primed Madame Neri for the killing."

"But it hardly seems possible," I gasped in amazement.

"Ah, Bailey, trust an artful woman to do the impossible every time!"

"Well, just what did happen?" I implored, weary of the uncertainty.

"Here, read the nauseating details yourself,"

he said disgustedly, and taking the paper from my hands he fingered it a moment, then pointing to certain large headlines dropped the paper on my lap. Picking it up I read:

SLUMP IN CONSOLIDATED COPPER
WELL-KNOWN BROKERAGE FIRM
LOSES HEAVILY

Apprehending that something had gone wrong, I asked Blondel whether the senior member had failed to follow his advice.

"No, that's the h—l of it!" he admitted bitterly. "You recall that he was to delude her into believing he would follow implicitly her spirit-revealed suggestions, but at the crucial moment do just the reverse. Well, after having advised him on several occasions to buy Consolidated Copper while the market was low the crafty woman yesterday pretended to have received a new spirit-message countermanding former ones, which message strongly advised him not to buy the stock now. Accordingly, what does the senior member do but take this as certain indication his rivals considered the stock

potentially too valuable to sacrifice and were trying to hedge, swallow the bait, and that very day buy in one hundred and fifty thousand shares. The market broke—well, you can imagine the rest.”

“Tough luck, isn’t it!”

“But that’s not the worst—here read this,” and fishing in his pocket he pulled out and handed to me a large, square envelope addressed to him in a beautiful feminine script. Taking out the letter I read:

Signor Blondel:

My sincere thanks for your timely help in the recent transaction between the brokers. But for your coming I am sure we couldn’t have unloaded much of the Consolidated, which we’ve wanted to get rid of a long time. This morning, perhaps, you are richer in experience while I am some ten thousand to the good. The next time you match your EXPERT knowledge against a woman’s wit, allow for a grain or two of intuition, won’t you? Adieu, my dear sir.

Yours, etc.,

BETTINA NERI.

"Sorry for you, old man," I remarked soothingly, handing the envelope to Blondel. "However, come to think of it, the matter's not so bad after all . . . the brokers can in time recoup——."

"Damn the brokers!" Blondel howled, "I'm not worrying about them. It's my pride, Bailey . . . Ugh, buncoed by a woman! . . . Say, old fellow, as you go home stop at the corner drug store and order me some catnip tea, a baby's rattle and celluloid ring—I haven't cut my eye-teeth yet!"

BUD DALTON GETS RELIGION

Nothing else in the uncrowded calendar of Slaughters-Stand vied in interest with the annual revival meeting, which generally began the second Sunday in August and continued two weeks. Quite naturally the inhabitants of a remote Tennessee mountain village were a bit more "peert" than usual when some peripatetic movie man with an acetylene outfit put in his appearance and exhibited films ten or fifteen years old, featuring among other screen idols Charlie Chaplin in his once-famous pie-throwing stunts. And, of course, the voters always perked up when the numerous candidates for county and state offices condescended to pay Slaughters-Stand a visit and, after much hand-shaking, to crack musty jokes for their edification. But come what might from January to December, nothing so aroused and solidified community interest and was anticipated with such deep concern as the services held each August by the Primitive Baptists in the old Bethel Meeting House.

The community was not a denominational

unit. There were some dozen dissenters, not including a Campbellite—as the church folk persisted in calling him—an old Jewish merchant, who by a strange deal of fortune had become identified with the community many years ago, and ten or fifteen “sinners,” principally young bucks who not yet had had their fling at life and who each season resisted successfully all inducements to “git religion.” However, the preponderance of Baptists was such as to give them without protest a veritable monopoly of religious activity in the village.

Among the young bucks Bud Dalton was undisputed leader. He was a handsome six-footer, broad-shouldered and lithe-limbed, a hard drinker at too frequent intervals and, when tanked up on “white mule,” the most dangerous man in the neighborhood. Many were the maudlin escapades charged against him; from most of which none-the-less he went scot free, largely because his father, a deputy sheriff, was cravenly afraid of him and, for paternal reasons, prone to shield him. So notorious, however, had become his misconduct a few weeks before the opening of the August revival the High Sheriff

had taken cognizance and at the county seat had turned in against him five indictments, one of a rather serious nature.

There were a dozen venerable "pillars" in the Baptist Church, but the most venerable and influential was old Ebenezer Waring, whose nineteen year old daughter, Mollie, was the village belle. But Dalton loved Mollie to the point of desperation and any day would have bartered his soul to the devil if thereby he could have gained the object of his desires. Molly openly would have reciprocated but for the violent antipathy her doting father manifested toward Bud, whose name he forbade her to mention and whose presence in the home he would have resented as violently as a visit from old Lucifer.

Late one afternoon, a few days before the beginning of the revival, Bud sat on the front porch with both feet cocked on the railing, his head resting against the back of the old-fashioned rocker. At the other end, twenty feet distant, his mother sat knitting yarn socks. For half an hour the garrulous youth kept rigid silence, a procedure so strange as to awe his mother and cause her to steal occasional glances over her

silver-rimmed spectacles. Suddenly he relaxed, brought both feet to the floor with a meaningful thud and emitted an enigmatic chuckle.

"Whut's the matter, Buddie?" his mother asked quickly, dropping the knitting in her lap.

"Oh, jest thinkin' 'o somethin' funny," he answered smilingly, as he arose and walked toward the front door.

Mrs. Dalton sighed gently, followed with a sidelong glance the retreating figure till out of sight, then shaking her head perplexedly, resumed her knitting.

That evening as Mr. Dalton passed the door of Bud's room he glanced in and saw Bud sitting at his table poring over a book. Could he be mistaken? Was it really the Bible his wife had given Bud on his thirteenth birthday? A second glance as he leaned backwards satisfied him—and he marveled although wisely refraining from comment.

When he returned to the bed-room he told his wife, who countered with the incident on the porch.

"Whut new divilmint is he up to now, I won-

der?" queried anxiously the long-suffering father.

"Mebbe hit aint no devilmint, Jerry. He didn't seem in no bad sperits this atternoon . . . don't be too hard——"

"Hard!" interrupted the intimidated parent, heaving a deep sigh, "wisht to God I could be hard on 'im—mebbe I'd larn 'im some show fer other folks's rights!"

Mrs. Dalton made no reply. Mr. Dalton sat on the bed railing, pulled off his heavy shoes and none too gently tossed them under the bed. "Sometimes, Mirandy," he continued, in sour mood without rising, "I 'most kin pray that the Grand Jury and the Jedge 'll put 'im fer a season whar——"

"Jerry Dalton, whut do ye mean? . . . Yore own flesh and blood in jail?" wheezed his astounded wife, coming to a sitting posture and eyeing him askance.

"To be shore, jest that!" he snapped back, "per'aps atter he come home he'd be hankerin' to mind his own bizness a spell!"

Mrs. Dalton dropped limp on her pillow too dazed to reply, realizing as she did that Bud

stood a mighty good chance this time of being sent up for at least six months. Mr. Dalton blew out the candle, threw himself without another word on the big four-poster and soon fell asleep.

That night the old-fashioned clock on the mantel piece ticked off monotonously the long hours while a mother, bruised in heart for the misdeeds of an erring boy and fearful of dire disgrace, prayed as only such a mother can pray.

Next morning the issue was not reopened. At breakfast Bud was his usual talkative self, so mother and father exchanged covert glances of relief.

The intervening days passed without special event. Saturday marked the arrival of the preacher, Rev. Jabez Whitley, and witnessed a most thorough cleansing of the church house at the hands of the Ladies' Aid Society.

Sunday morning at eleven the building was packed, every able-bodied citizen of Slaughters-Stand feeling in duty bound to attend. The dissenters were there, and, of course, the gay young bucks of the community who, diked out in their finest and redolent of civet, occupied the rear

middle bench, which from time immemorial had been relegated to the use of "sinners."

The Rev. Jabez Whitley, a long-whiskered, black-frosted gentleman of cadaverous mien, slender build and pronounced nasal twang, had three mortal antipathies: Infant Baptism; Foreign Missions; the Campbellite Church. These were well known to the villagers inasmuch as the reverend gentleman some six years previously had held a meeting in Slaughters-Stand. Out in the church-yard before the service began the "sinners" had bet freely on the theme of his first sermon.

"Two to one," offered Whit Handly, "hit's furrin missions."

"Even money," cried Joe Leighton, "hit's infunt baptism."

"Three to two," bandied Lafe Starrett, "hit's a-goin' to be the Campbellites."

"Four to two," ventured Bill Carrington, "he horns all three uv 'em."

Each bet found ready acceptance; still the bucks were surprised that Bud Dalton held aloof. However, they had conceded him the right to do as he pleased for so long, in this instance there

was no challenge—they attributed his silence to a passing whim.

When the wheezy old organ announced the real opening of the service the bucks filed in, each giving a final touch to his carefully groomed person.

To dwell on the details of the service would be irrelevant, and perhaps irreverent. Suffice, that when the long benediction had been intoned and the bucks had foregathered to settle the wagers, Bill Carrington went home the richer by some eight or ten dollars.

Four days passed and the interest in the meeting had gained great headway. Thursday night the mourners' bench was filled, mainly with boys and girls. Sister Elvira Townsend got gloriously happy and shouted, as she had been wont to do annually for thirty years, incidently embracing the Rev. Jabez Whitley in the course of her frenzied gyrations. Bud Dalton never missed a meeting, and, what puzzled his comrade bucks, refrained punctiliously from facetious comments on persons and events.

"Bud's gittin' pious, I cal'late," remarked Cy Graham archly.

"Reckin he's not a-feelin peert," answered Abe Rutland seriously.

"Per'aps he's consid'able worrit about the grand jury," chuckled Joe Leighton.

"I opine he's solumly tryin' to git religion," drawled Jed Barrett, at mention of which rank incongruity the bucks howled with laughter.

Sunday night came and standing room was at a premium. The "sinners" bench had been vacated to accommodate rural visitors, especially the fair sex, so the former occupants, a dozen strong, stood against the rear wall, Bud Dalton in the centre.

The text for the evening was Psalms 9: 17: "The wicked shall be turned into hell and all the nations that forget God." For an hour and twenty minutes the Rev. Jabez Whitley dangled the souls of the unsaved over the infernal pit as he pictured in graphic terms, caught largely from his reading of the Puritan forefathers, the lurid depths of hell seething with unquenchable fires. Children shuddered and snuggled closer to their mothers while bearded fathers in the amen corner loudly acclaimed "Lord have mercy!" "Save us, Jesus!" "Oh Lord, pity!" "Bless His name!"

The gruesome discourse finished, the frenzied preacher descended from his rude pulpit and began a strident plea for mourners to come and fill the benches. Numbers responded to the appeal, but still there was room. Lifting his voice to an unexpected pitch he screamed out brimstonny warnings to the unsaved:

“Come on, stiff-necked sinners, you’re in the hands of an angry God who may cast you into hell-fire . . . repent and drink the cup of salvation . . . the Lamb’s blood has been spilt, drink, an’ old Satan cain’t hurt ye. Don’t you see the pit a-yawnin’ and the devil a-rubbin’ his horny hands an’ commandin’ his imps to shovel more coal on the fire? . . . I kin almost smell lost souls a-sizzlin’ an’—”

The frightful exhortation ceased as if the Rev. Jabez Whitley had suffered vocal paralysis. He stood tense, staring at a tall figure in the left aisle moving quickly toward the front. It was Bud Dalton, making his way from the rear, amid the buzzing of tongues, the craning of necks, the Ohs and Ahs of a surprised throng, his form erect, his tread fearless, his features immobile. Reaching the front he shook hands with the

preacher then knelt down at the mourner's bench and covered his face with his hands.

The effect on the audience was startling. It was the most dramatic moment in the religious life of Slaughters-Stand since old Tom Landis, twenty years previously, had rushed to the mourners' bench crying aloud for the Lord to have mercy on his poor, wizened soul.

"Praise the Lord, glory, hallelujah!" shouted Rev. Jabez Whitley, striding to and fro, gesticulating wildly .

"Thank the good Lord, my prayers have at last been answered!" cried the jubilant Mrs. Dalton, with streaming eyes.

"Amen, praise His name!" chimed in a chorus of gray-beards sitting near the pulpit.

"Glory! Glory!" screamed a dozen frenzied women.

"Lord, bless us, who'd 'a 'xpected hit!" blubbered good old Ebenezer Waring to his wife, as he reached for his handkerchief.

"Hit's too good to be true!" sang Mollie Waring softly to her own heart.

"Well, I'll be damned!" sputtered Jed Barrett,

gazing blankly at the sheepish faces of the young bucks lined against the wall.

"Come on, hardened sinners, thar's plenty of room yit . . . another precious soul snatched frum hell-fire . . . that's right, come on, sister . . . glory, glory, cain't ye hear the angels a-shoutin' hallelujah!" screamed the ecstatic preacher as he shook hands with the salvation-seekers who, under the contagion of the moment, streamed toward the mourners' bench.

Never was such a meeting in Slaughters-Stand within the memory of the oldest inhabitants. A score made "bright" professions, among them three of the callous young bucks. Bud's surrender fitly rounded out the evening's thrills, and when old Ebenezer Waring strode forward and warmly shook his hands the hysterical audience forgot its Sunday manners and applauded.

A quarter of an hour later as Bud, with Mollie for the first time in two years clinging tremblingly to his arm, passed through the door he saw Jed Barrett a few feet distant gazing at him quizzically. A knowing wink, a slight puckering of the lips, a fond glance at the girl by his side, and he stepped briskly into the dark.

For the remaining days of the momentous revival Bud Dalton was the one hero. All other professions failed to arouse general interest, while he was held up as a shining example to the sinners still out of the fold. Beyond the church pale, however, comment was sharply divided:

"Bet he cain't hold out," croaked Mollie Waring's rival for social preeminence, Marian Street.

"Sour grapes, eh!" came the acid retort of Seth Tucker, as he measured off ten yards of gingham.

"I'll be dad-blasted if I hain't a sneakin' idee he's atter somethin'," drawled Eph Holden, as he carefully emptied a mouth full of tobacco juice through a hole in the post office floor.

"Me, too," dittoed, dour John Duff, biting off another "chaw" of long green.

"Purty ones, ye air, to be questi'nin' a feller's gittin' religion," angrily retorted Josiah Staley, one of the church "pillars."

"I'm afeered hit wuz too suddin-like," sighed timid Mrs. Heath Slaton to her husband at the breakfast table.

"Minervy, you hadn't orter questi'n the Lord's

providences," definitely pronounced the head of the house.

"Pears to me he tuk it too ca'm-like," mildly criticized Sister Dibrell, Chairman of the Ladies' Aid Society. "When folks gits religion I allus likes to see 'em take it hard."

"But all folks ain't alike," protested Sister Nelson of garrulous proclivity, "now, when I got religion nigh onto forty year ago—"

"Of course," brusquely interrupted Sister Hatfield, wife of Slaughters-Stand's leading merchant, who had heard the story twenty times, "we cain't all come to Jesus like Saul of Tarsus, a-fallin' down an' seein' visions an' gittin' blinded by strange lights."

"Well, anyways I got my doubts about hits genu-ine-ness—they ez wants to kin think diffrint," smirked Miss Ophelia Skinner, spinster of thirty-five and leading village *censor morum*, squinting her left eye in the effort to thread a needle.

"And sence when didn't ye have doubts about ev'ry body?" snapped Sister Darlington, a widow of thirty-two, whose pet aversion was this Miss Ophelia Skinner.

"Wait an' see, I say, time will out," suavely interjected the minister's wife, anxious to avoid an unpleasant scene at the meeting of the Ladies' Aid Society.

When the revival closed and the natives dropped back into the rut of village life, Bud divided his time pretty evenly between home affairs and courting Mollie and playing up to her pious father. Very seldom, as formerly, was he seen loafing in town or gadding about with the young bucks, all of which was favorably cited as evidence of true regeneration.

Came court week early in September and Bud, accompanied by his father, journeyed on horseback to the county seat, where reports of his conversion had preceded him and where many congratulations were tendered by friends and acquaintances familiar with his malodorous past. Among these was the County Judge, Ben Longstreet, a sturdy old veteran of the Civil War.

As usual on such occasions, the court room was crowded with a motley throng of loafers and litigants. When the clerk summoned Bud to

answer the first indictment he came forward alone and standing meekly before the judge said:

"Please yore honor, they's five indictmints agin me on the docket an' I pleads guilty to all uv 'em an' begs the mercy o' the Court. I hain't ingaged no lawyer to riprisint me 'cause they wa'n't no need uv none. I'll take my pun-ish-mint, Jedge, an' nary a croak—all I axes is to let me down ez easy-like ez you kin, Jedge, fer I hain't any intenshuns o' comin' here ag'in."

As Bud sat down the motley crowd of spectators buzzed with such excitement that the Court rapped sharply for order.

Removing his silver-mounted spectacles and leaning forward on the desk, with hands clasped, Judge Longstreet looked straight at Bud and, waiving further court formalities in true autocratic fashion, delivered himself thus:

"Young man, totally unexpected as it is, I commend you for your straightforwardness in throwing yourself on the mercy of the Court. For a year or more I've been hearing rumors about your escapades in and near Slaughters-Stand and opened this session of court with the full expectation of having the unpleasant duty of

sentencing you to jail for at least six months and subjecting you to a heavy fine besides. Your unexpected lack of defense and your straight plea for mercy disarm me. I'd certainly hate to send the worst of men to jail just after he had professed religion. Under the circumstances, and out of regard for your good father and mother, whom I have known for thirty years, I shall waive imprisonment and dismiss you with a fine of—h-m-m—let me see,” as he put on his spectacles and reached for his papers, “carrying a pistol; public drunkenness and disorderly conduct; disturbing worship at Shiloh Meeting House; shooting on streets of Slaughters-Stand; assault and battery—say, \$125.00 and costs and \$85.00 damages awarded Jim Bently for assault. If ever again you appear before this Court no mercy whatever will be shown you. Clerk, call the next case.”

When Bud and his astounded father left the court room with all eyes turned in their direction, Jed Barrett was standing at the door, waiting to be called as witness in Bud's defense, the same quizzical expression on his face he wore the night of Bud's transformation. As the latter brushed

by without a word he gave him another significant wink accompanied by an unmistakable pucker of the lips.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he muttered, as turning in a moment he followed the retreating couple.

When the news reached Slaughters-Stand the village once more hummed with comment favorable and adverse. Bud, however, wisely avoided publicity, devoting his whole heart and art to courting Mollie and flattering her sentimental father, who, now that fear of imprisonment was no more, began to look on Bud's suit with genuine favor. Never did he seem to weary of Bud's A. E. F. experiences in France, so the artful lover strained his imagination to capacity in the daily effort to conjure up the most thrilling tales and personal experiences. Vividly he described the imaginary attack of a German submarine, the shock of the torpedo, the blowing up of the transport, his struggles in the water, the death by drowning of a hundred "Sammies," the final rescue by a destroyer. Again, he told with many thrills his storming of machine gun nests and capturing of burly Huns, who threw up their hands

crying "Kamerad!"; or pictured gruesomely his knifing a German in No Man's Land; or painted with glowing words the heroic part he played at Chateau Thierry, where he was attacked by two huge Huns who came near causing him to "go west." The simple-minded man gulped all ravenously and Bud was in transports.

Autumn began to wane. Heavy frosts brought down the hickory nuts and opened the chestnut burrs. Deeming the time ripe for action Bud asked Mollie:

"Cain't we set the weddin' day soon?"

"If poppy 'll consent," was the laconic reply.

That night Bud asked the old man for his daughter's hand. At first the doting parent balked, pleading for delay till spring. Bud persisted and gained his point. The banns in due order were proclaimed, congratulations and felicitations were accepted, and merrily rang the old church bell on that crisp November morning when Bud and Mollie stood under the holly wreath and plighted eternal troth.

During the long ceremony, Jed Barrett, acting as usher, stood near the door, ruminating. Swiftly he reviewed the events of preceding weeks in

the hope of reaching a satisfying decision as to the genuineness of Bud's conversion. "Ding me," he concluded with a wrinkling of the fore head, "if 'e haint got me a-guessin' atter all—"

"Amen!" pronounced the minister, lustily, and the organist immediately made a stagger at the immortal Wedding March from Lohengrin as Bud with Mollie, blushingly beautiful, clinging to his arm, stepped from the platform into the aisle. Approaching the addle-brained usher he winked a third time at that village worthy, accentuating the wink with a pucker of the lips altogether unmistakable.

"Well, I'll be damned," chuckled the disillusioned usher, admiringly, as he reached under a bench for his hat. . . . Git religion? Hell no! whut he wuz atter gittin' wuz Mollie, and dam' me, if 'e hain't got 'er!"

BLONDEL'S COUP

I had just finished supper and was scanning the evening paper when Blondel called me.

"Anything on hand tonight?" he asked.

"Nothing special."

"What about going to see Charpentier at the Royal?"

"Who is he?"

"The French hypnotist I was telling you about recently. He is exceptionally clever, and, I notice from the paper, begins a week's engagement tonight."

I had long wished to see the work of a really skillful hypnotist so promptly accepted the invitation.

Very well—meet me at the theatre shortly before eight."

We purchased tickets and got settled just in time to see Charpentier make his bow to the large, promiscuous audience. In appearance he was an ideal hypnotist, presumably about forty, tall and well proportioned, with black hair,

waxed mustaches, and lustrous eyes of an indescribably sinister expression. A shudder rippled through me as I listened to his suave introduction and caught the glint of eyes that recalled gruesomely the days when superstitious folk burned at the stake the possessors of such mesmeric vision.

After the usual preliminaries the hypnotist called for volunteers. A dozen young fellows responded, and for the next half-hour the wily Frenchman swayed the spectators at will from hilarious mirth to awe-thrilled silence. When the last volunteer had been dismissed with thanks, the hypnotist advanced to the footlights and, bowing most graciously in response to the generous applause, said:

"Ladies and zhentlemen, you haf had ze pleasure of witnessing tonight some of ze marvelous possibilities of hypnotism; but I haf ze honor now to show you somet'ing zat ees still more marvelous. Allow me first, ladies and zhentlemen, to present to you Mademoiselle Christine."

As he finished there emerged from the right wing a young woman so strikingly attractive in

form and feature that instantly the emotionally wrought audience burst into applause, to all of which, however, she seemed strangely indifferent. My first feeling was one of resentment. She must indeed be very supercilious, I thought; but before the applause had died away I felt convinced from a brief study of her face that within was some indefinable sadness, some subtle mystery of grief that was slowly eating away her very life.

Charpentier made ample amends for Mademoiselle's impassiveness by bowing repeatedly to the demonstrative audience. When the applause had ceased he continued:

"Ladies and zhentlemen, you are very kind. I t'ank you for ze very great honor you do Ma'm'selle Christine. She ees very timid, ladies and zhentleman, very timid! and now, ladies and zhentlemen, by your kind permis-si-on I show you ze real, ze truly marvelous hypnotism. Mademoiselle ees a wonderful subject—she respond beautifully. See, ladies and zhentlemen, I look at her, so, and vave ze hand, up, down, and *preste!* she ees asleep, and nobody

can wake her . . . and if I command, she sleep a day, a week—mebbe always!”

For a moment the cunning artist paused to note the effect on his audience, then resumed:

“But look, ladies and zhentlemen, I haf but to say ‘Christine awake!’ and she open her eyes and smile at ze audience,” and smile she did, although with a sadness that was painful to witness.

“See, ladies and zhentlemen, how perfectly she obey my vill, yet I speak no vord to Ma’m’selle . . . I blindfold her, so . . . and give ze command ‘sleep!’ and she move in ze direction I vave my hand, so—” then as if pulled by some invisible mechanism the miserable slave of his will moved right or left, forward or backward as he directed, the hypnotist all the while standing behind her.

Without removing the bandage he next led Christine to the middle of the stage and continued:

“Ladies and zhentleman, look . . . I command Ma’m’selle ‘sleep!’ ‘sleep!’ ‘sleep!’ and she ees in a deep trance and can feel no pain. See, I pinch her cheek hard . . . I stick ze hat pin

t'rough de arm . . . I hold ze lighted match under her hand—but she not feel it. Ah! ladies,” noting sounds of protest from the audience, “you must not feel sorry for Ma’m’selle—she ees not avake and she haf no pain. But *allons!* vill several of ze ladies and zhentlemen kindly put on ze cards vat zey like to see Ma’m’selle do and hand ze cards to me?”

In a very few minutes he had received a dozen or two cards. Picking up one at random he read its request silently then threw the card back into the audience. Turning to Christine, who was twenty feet distant, he commanded: “Ma’m’selle vill do vat ze lady request!”

Instantly the blindfolded girl walked to the front of the stage and sang in French a stanza of the Marseillaise. Again he read a card, flipped it into the audience, and gave command. Very promptly Christine walked up and soundly boxed his ears to the great amusement of the spectators and to my astonishment, for I had written the request.

While the audience was still simmering with mirth Charpentier glanced at his watch and, pleading lack of time as apology for not heeding

other requests, begged the spectators to observe closely the next and final feature of the evening's program. Approaching Christine, he said:

"Ladies and zhentlemen, as you are avare, Ma'm'selle ees in a trance, but I speak to her 'Christine, sleep! . . . deeper! . . . deeper!' and make passes . . . so . . . and a *merveille!* she ees in ze cataleptic stage . . . Vill ze zhentlemen yonder," pointing out a large man in the front row, "kindly come to ze platform and assist me?"

Promptly the gentleman mounted the stage, and with his assistance the hypnotist placed Christine so that her head and shoulders rested on one chair, her feet on another. Then in very matter of fact tones he said: "Vill ze zhentleman kindly stand on Ma'm'selle's body?"

The audience roared as the man shook his head decisively, and backed away. "Ah, zen, I must do it myself!" he added smilingly, and without more ado he stepped with his one hundred eighty pounds or more on the delicate, rigid form, which, strange to tell, scarcely swayed under the terrible pressure. The consternation of the spectators was indescribable.

Overjoyed with his success, the cunning artist again expressed his thanks in a series of low bows, then issuing a few strong commands to his helpless subject he caught her rudely by the shoulders and lifted her to a standing position. Next, he made rapid mesmeric passes the full length of her body and babbled: "Look, ladies and zhentlemen, I show you zat Christine ees not hurt. Avake, Ma'm'selle! . . . *je te commande!* . . . Avake! . . . See, she ees beginning to vake . . . *voyons voyons!* Ma'm'selle, you shall feel no pain. Ah, *bien! bien!* now she ees avake! Bow to ze ladies and zhentlemen." With thundrous applause the audience responded to the formal but soulless bow of the wretched girl, then rushed for the doors.

Blondel and I elbowed our way through the crowd, and not until we were outside did I have occasion to ask his opinion of the performance.

"Very clever work, Bailey, good as I have ever seen—better than when he was here two years ago."

"Do you think there was any trickery?"

"Not a bit—much better for Christine if

there had been. Poor girl, what a miserable life she must lead!"

"She certainly must be unhappy. Did you notice how inexpressibly sad she looked at times. Her face still haunts me. Perhaps her conscience—"

"No, it can't be that—it's because she's the abject slave of that cunning French scoundrel."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this: that poor girl somehow or other has fallen into his clutches and can't extricate herself. She is his slave, his puppet—as helpless now as an infant in the hands of a giant. Undoubtedly he has humiliated her, possibly sullied her womanhood, maybe."

"Well, why don't she leave him?"

"She can't, any more than you can pull the moon out of its orbit. The power of hypnotism is practically unlimited in the case of one who has subjected himself repeatedly to the process. Her will power, so far as he is concerned, is a totally negligible quantity. Doubtless, while in the trance state he has given her frequent post-hypnotic suggestions to the effect that she can

not in any manner escape his power. As a result her motor powers are all but paralyzed."

"But what about appealing to the Courts or her relatives?"

"Yes, presumably, unless restrained by personal considerations of a very embarrassing sort. Readily, you perceive that if she has been compromised, modesty might restrain her from the necessity of divulging ugly secrets in a court room. Many women unhesitatingly would prefer death to such an ordeal. One thing, however, seems inevitable—she is doomed to an early death. Her mind and body can not endure much longer the strain under which she labors nightly. I have known several similar cases, all of them pitiful, and premature death via the insanity route was the invariable end."

"If your surmises are true, Charpentier must be a devil!"

"Maybe, but I dare say he's been shrewd enough to conceal his diabolism under the mask of legal agreement. He is not the only hypnotist I have known who has ensnared unsuspecting victims and sent them in a few months to the asylum—or the suicide's grave. God pity her!

there is only one avenue of possible escape from his tyrannous power, and he is too smart ever to leave this open."

"Escape? . . . thought you just said her case was hopeless. If there's a chance—"

"Oh, it's useless—the chance is too remote. In a few weeks, or at the most, months, it will be the old, old story:

'One more unfortunate
Gone to her death.'

Well one night's enough for me . . . it's a cinch I don't go any more . . . too harrowing! . . . good night," and he left rather hurriedly to catch a passing car.

Late the following afternoon as I was locking my desk preparatory to leaving the office, Blondel rang me. From the urgency of his request that I see him after supper I judged that something extraordinary was on foot, so, after a hasty meal, set out for his rooms. When I arrived he was pacing the floor in deep agitation.

"What's up?" I asked, almost before the door closed behind me.

"Sit down, Bailey, and listen: we haven't much time to talk, and I've a lot to tell you."

"Blaze away," I answered, dropping into a rocking chair near the window.

"It's about the wretched girl we saw last night. Today, just after dinner, I went out for a little fresh air, and while walking through Forest Park saw near Lincoln's statue a young woman sitting on one of the stone benches with an open book lying on her lap. I suppose I wouldn't have noticed her but for the fact she seemed so listless and careworn. Turning down a by-path I glanced at her profile beneath a broad-brimmed hat and was astonished to find the Christine of our last night's entertainment—"

"How singular!"

"Passing on a short distance I paused and watched her a few moments; then, as if by inspiration, I determined to take a seat by her and try to gain her confidence and thereby learn the story of her life. When I sat down a little to her right she did not even look up or change her position in the slightest. Presently I lifted my hat and asked if she were not Mademoiselle Christine. As one suddenly wakened from a trance,

she drew back startled, looked wildly about her, then gazed at me with the hunted look we observed last night.

"After introducing myself and convincing her I interposed as a friend, she grew calmer and listened attentively when I told her I was at the theatre last evening and witnessed Charpentier's exploitation of her. Instantly, at the mention of his name, her cheeks paled, her eyes took on a momentary wild look and quickly she glanced all around to see if the Frenchman was in sight.

"I managed in a few seconds to quiet her alarm by assuring her he was not in the park, then hastened to tell her I wished to help."

" 'Help me!' she answered utterly astounded at the proffer of sympathy, and keenly aware of its apparent hopelessness, 'There is no help for me—I am lost!' and her face was the picture of despair.

"Strongly I combatted her mood. I mentioned my standing as an expert hypnotist and student of psychic phenomena and assured her if she would give me the story of her life, how long she had been with Charpentier, to what extent he exercised power over her off the stage, etc.,

I might be able to render her very material assistance. 'You are in direst distress, child, I pleaded, you need a friend, tell me all.'

"Lifting her head slowly, she looked into my eyes a full half minute, then glanced about her quickly fearful that the dreaded form of the hypnotist might be lurking near. Reassured on this point, she turned and looked at me again searchingly. 'I believe I can trust you,' she said quietly.

"Deeply touched by her confidence, I thanked her. Then she told me the story of her connection with Charpentier—and what a tragedy, Bailey! If detailed it would eclipse most of the extravagant fancies in the cheapest sensational fiction. It sickens me even to recall her dreadful experiences, and my blood literally boils at the thought of that hell-hound's villainy, damn him! I'd like to squeeze the very heart out of him!" and Blondel clenched his hands fiercely and stamped the floor in a rage.

"But come," I reminded him, "time is precious, and I am eager to hear the story."

"It will sicken you, too, Bailey, and I can't tell you much now. Charpentier met her nine months ago in Quebec—at a small hotel. Her pa-

rents, who came from France, have been dead several years. They left her practically nothing, so she had to work for her living in a large glove factory. One night, in the midst of a small gathering, she complained of a headache. Charpentier overheard and told her he could cure it quickly. Gratefully she allowed him to make mesmeric passes and to give suggestions, and almost before she realized what was happening his magnetic gaze and strong will power had overmastered her, and she was hypnotized.

"To cut matters short, this was the beginning of his domination, a domination that enslaved her will, compelled her in the spring to follow him from Quebec, and since that time has blighted her virtue, robbed her of the right to happiness and reduced her to the degrading level of a mere chattel, a valuable commercial asset, the utility of which is as short-lived as it is financially precious."

"But why, in the name of decency, don't her relatives interfere?"

"She hasn't any this side of France—and if she had, what could they do so long as his power envelops her? He has cultivated this

power to such extent that even when miles away he can will her into a trance. While she was talking to me suddenly her tongue stopped in the middle of a word, her lashes drooped and in a few seconds she was in a trance. I shook her gently, called her by name—but without avail. Five minutes later she sighed, slowly opened her eyes, and, as if nothing had happened, continued her narrative beginning with the next syllable of the very word that had died away on her tongue. Upon inquiry I found that Charpentier frequently resorts to this method of suggestion from a distance and that when alone she lives in constant dread of being thrown into a trance.

“You can easily imagine my astonishment when a little later, as if drawn by an unseen, irresistible force, she suddenly ceased talking, sighed, rose quickly from the stone bench and utterly oblivious of my presence walked rapidly away through the park. I followed at a reasonable distance and managed to spot the hotel where she and Charpentier are staying—The Clarendon, on Sixteenth near Third Avenue.”

“How pitiable!—and to think we can do nothing to help her!”

“As to that, listen. When she had finished telling me the sordid particulars of her life I asked if Charpentier is of a greedy, miserly disposition, and was overjoyed to learn that he is rapaciously covetous of gold. Of course, I knew he was vain—anybody could see that last night, so when Christine told me of his miserliness my plan of action was instantly devised and communicated in detail to her. She was profoundly interested in the mere thought of being rescued from the villian’s clutches, yet I could see, poor creature, she had little faith in the efficacy of the scheme I proposed.

“And here is where you come in, Bailey. I want you to get a front seat tonight and watch Charpentier very closely when I am on the stage—”

“You on the stage! . . . you don’t mean—”

“And observe very minutely how he looks at me. Try to hold in mind every significant glance, gesture or facial expression that indicates the slightest suspicion of me. I am going to try to beat the Frenchman at his own game. Two hours after my interview with Christine I called on him, introduced myself as an amateur hypno-

tist greatly interested in several phases of the art, in particular, that of delegated control. I inflamed his vanity by subtly lavish praise of his masterly power over Christine, told him I had long wished to make trial of the possibilities of delegated control and that Christine afforded the best opportunity I had ever witnessed. Further, I suggested that the stunt of hypnotizing the girl, then commanding her to obey the will of a stranger, would tickle the fancy of the audience and later swell appreciably the box office receipts. In addition, I offered to pay him handsomely for the privilege. To end matters, he agreed for twenty-five dollars to diversify the entertainment tonight by allowing me to try my supposedly long-cherished experiment."

"I begin to see dimly what you are driving at, but didn't you say last night that by repeated suggestions Charpentier had made it all but impossible for anyone else to hypnotize her?"

"You forget that I am talking about delegated control. Charpentier will hypnotize her, after which he will command her to obey my directions. I am basing everything on the possibility of shortly securing such mastery of her will

power as will warrant me in defying Charpentier to resume control. It is but an experiment, and a daring one, and the odds are against me. If I succeed tonight I shall bribe him to grant me permission to try other experiments tomorrow night. Two things count in my favor: hypnotism, as you know, is simply the control exercised over a will by another will presumably, for the time being, the stronger; or, if you please, the subjection voluntary or involuntary of one will to domination by another. This relationship of hypnotist and subject implies that for the time being the controlling factor must ever be the stronger will of the two.

“Now, by further implication in the case of delegated authority, if it should happen that the second hypnotist, to whom the authority is delegated, possesses a stronger will than the first, he may, after securing masterful control of the subject, match will power with that of his rival, catch him by surprise, defy him successfully and thus beat him at his own game. You know that I have practiced hypnotism for twenty-five years, hence am not a novice at the game. As to

whose will is the stronger, subsequent events must prove.

“The other consideration is this: I have Christine on my side. Fortunately, all my plans were communicated to her before, in the telepathically induced trance, she left me in the park. The poor girl realizes that all she holds dear is at stake. I have strongly impressed on her that during her waking moments she must be constantly suggesting to herself the necessity of responding instantly to my commands and inhibitions. This I hope will react favorably upon her subjective consciousness and predispose her to readier compliance when under hypnosis. To what extent she is capable now of effectively suggesting to herself refusal to obey Charpentier, I can not determine.

“But it is high time we were leaving. Don’t forget your part, old man. Everything may depend on it. Tomorrow night will come the crisis, and I must know how far he suspects me. If he is unsuspecting, I shall be able tomorrow night to work with an abandon that otherwise might prove ruinous.”

In half an hour we were at the theatre occupy-

ing different seats on the front row. At eight, Charpentier advanced smiling from the right wing and bowed often and obsequiously to his appreciative audience. After a few glib remarks he called for volunteers and made monkeys of them for an hour to the immense delight of the spectators.

An artful interlude followed, designed to arouse unusual interest in Christine, whose soul the audience did not know was to be battled for by two powerful wills. The unfortunate girl stepped quietly forward at the command of her master, bowed unemotionally to the audience, then faced Charpentier awaiting instructions.

As on former occasions, the hypnotist demonstrated his complete mastery of Christine's volitions by a variety of commands and prohibitions, the exact fulfilment of which wrought bewilderment among the spectators and evoked frequent applause. At length, having requested Christine, still in the state of hypnosis, to take a seat facing the audience, he advanced to the foot-lights and said:

"Ladies and zhentlemen, it ees a pleasure indeed to see you de-lighted wit' Mademoiselle.

She ees a marvelous subject! And you haf not seen all ze great feats she accomplish. I now haf ze pleasure, ladies and zhentlemen, of showing you somet'ing not yet attempted on ze public platform. Ma'm'selle, as you see, ees still hypnotized. My control of her vill now be transferred to another hypnotist, a zhentleman of your city who ees present. Vill Monsieur Blondel kindly come forward?"

Quietly Blondel mounted the stage and was presented to the audience. "Remember, ladies and zhentlemen, the Monsieur vill by my permission take control of Christine—he ees a perfect stranger to ze young lady," the Frenchman concluded, stepping to one side of the stage.

Calling to Christine, he commanded her to stand. "Mademoiselle," he requested in firm tones, "it ees my vill zat you obey ze commands of Monsieur Blondel. He ees your master now. *Comprenez vous?*"

Christine bowed her head in acknowledgment.

"Monsieur Blondel," he announced, "Christine ees in your power; she vill do as you command."

Very calmly Blondel addressed himself to his great task, while the spectators watched with almost breathless interest. By a few simple tests he satisfied himself that Christine was really hypnotized, after which he proceeded to accustom her to the sound of his voice and to ready compliance with instructions. Joyfully, he found that she responded to his wishes as readily as to those of Charpentier. Cautiously he advanced from the simple to the more complex tests, his object being to secure firmer control of his subject without arousing the suspicion of the hypnotist. Purposely on several occasions he blundered slightly in order to give color to his supposed amateurishness.

In spite of my promise to watch Charpentier closely I found myself every little while following Blondel's movements with acutest attention. As he warmed to the task he seemed to become another individual. His cheeks glowed with ruddy tinge, his eyes flashed fire, his manner indicated complete but artful self-absorption, while his commands rang out in clear, firm, vibrant tones that suggested latent power of unusual magnitude. A large per cent of his commands

took the form of prohibitions, tactfully sandwiched between positive directions. To me alone his purpose soon became evident. He was paving the way for his crucial clash with Charpentier, the successful issue of which he knew inevitably must lie in Christine's response to his prohibitions touching the hypnotist.

For full three-quarters of an hour he enraptured his audience, and even extorted from the Frenchman an occasional *brave!* Apparently satisfied with results, or afraid to carry matters further, he thanked the spectators, expressed his appreciation to Charpentier and begged, if acceptable, he might have the privilege next evening of making still further experiments, promising to introduce certain original stunts which, he felt certain, would prove of very great interest.

The audience voiced approval by loud applause. Charpentier, delighted at the thought of reaping a rich harvest, readily acquiesced, even threw in by way of good measure unstinted praise of "Monsieur Blondel's artistic performance." Following these felicitations Blondel thanked Christine, issued the proper commands,

and once more she was under the sway of her heartless master, who in a few moments restored her to consciousness and dismissed the audience.

"Well," I asked, as soon as we were outside, "are you pleased with your first move?"

"Perfectly!"

"Good! and Charpentier was as unsuspecting as a mummy. You had him clean fooled."

"Are you sure? He is a shrewd scoundrel."

"Granted—but I'll wager against any odds he suspected nothing. The very fact that he agreed to give you the stage again proves this."

"Doubtless you're right . . . we've got him fooled, and if everything goes well we'll fool him still worse tomorrow night—the dirty scoundrel! I'd give a half-year's income to block his devilish game!"

"Frankly, old man, don't you think the odds are against you? Remember how often he has hypnotized her, and think what power of control habit gives him. Can you well expect after two, or even three, experiments to combat successfully this control? I comprehend how she must obey your slightest command, but for the life of me I can't see how you can keep Charpentier

from taking her again into his clutches when he so wills."

"You forget, Bailey, that Charpentier commands Christine to obey me. By that act she is surrendered to me: he abdicates, as it were, in my favor. Why then can't I, as master of her will, prohibit her by powerful suggestions from recognizing Charpentier, just as I can force her to ignore you?"

"You can, if your will is mighty enough to compel . . . it certainly looks plausible."

"Yes, theoretically there is no flaw in the logic, nevertheless I have strong misgivings about the issue. And yet, we must not overlook the fact that Christine's nature is in revolt against her oppressor. Her soul is captive, but it longs for freedom with an intensity you and I can hardly appreciate. Therefore, what little volitional strength she may have in reserve will undoubtedly at the crucial moment declare rebellion and thus strongly reenforce my commands."

"I hope so, devoutly!"

"Be on hand at seven sharp tomorrow evening. I may have some special instructions for you. Good night."

The more I thought about the matter the less hopeful I felt. Riotous fancy pictured Blondel on the stage utterly discomfited, with the astute Frenchman master of the situation, and the audience uproariously hilarious. Nevertheless, I was prompt to the minute next evening, and found Blondel faultlessly dressed and pacing the floor, as usual when under stress. Outwardly he appeared calm; he was a man of singular self-control under emergency, but his lustrous eyes revealed to me something of the seething within. I read in their glint determination and fearlessness, and felt like one approaching the crater of a volcano soon to erupt.

"Any instructions?" I asked quietly.

"None whatever tonight. Just take things easy and enjoy yourself. Of course, I'd like to experiment with Christine another night or two before the clash with Charpentier, but I'm fearful of arousing suspicion, so it's this evening or never. And, Bailey, you can bank on it—the crowd will get its money's worth of sensation for once."

"But suppose Charpentier gets desperate and—"

"So much the better. If I can get him excited,

wrought to a pitch of fury, he is my meat sure. In case he loses his head and attempts violence, don't think of interfering. This is my fight, remember—I can take care of myself. If I win, I want the sweet satisfaction of downing him singlehanded."

"All right, hands off it will be."

When we reached the theatre we found the room packed, and had considerable difficulty in securing seats. As the curtain rose and Charpentier came to the front, his face was all smiles and the audience unusually demonstrative. A dozen times he bowed his appreciation right and left, and when the applause ceased his unctuous words flowed like a sluice.

The preliminaries were very quickly disposed of, the hypnotist having the good sense to perceive that the spectators were eager for Blondel and Christine. As the poor girl approached from the right wing I was overjoyed to note a heightening of color in her cheeks and a restlessness of movement bespeaking an aroused soul. This time she did not stare vacantly at the crowd, but glanced nervously here and there until she discovered Blondel, when a genuine blush suffused

her countenance and the familiar hunted look vanished.

As usual, Charpentier demonstrated his uncanny skill, reveling inordinately in the exercise of his tyrannous power. Evidently he was bent on forcing his helpless subject to perform such ingenious stunts as would allow no envious comparison between his skill and that of the man who was to follow him. Blondel sat through his exhibition without a word, observing every movement with acutest attention. When the hypnotist invited him to the platform his face was pale, but the tightly drawn lips and calm manner showed a degree of self-control and determination that gave me confidence.

"Ladies and zhentlemen," announced the oily-tongued foreigner, "it gifs me great pleasure to present once more your accomplished fellow-citizen, Monsieur Blondel, who gave ze artistic performance last night. I know you vill find him most in-te-rest-ing. You see how Ma'm'selle respond to my command. I vill now delegate my control of her to Monsieur and command her to obey him. He vill be ze master . . . and if

he command her so, she vill even refuse to obey my instructions."

How my heart tripped as he made this fortunate admission! Blondel's face crimsoned, but otherwise he manifested no interest.

"Christine," the hypnotist said in commanding voice, "it ees my vill zat you obey Monsieur Blondel vatever he tell you to do. He ees your master. *Comprenez vous?*"

Christine nodded her head in affirmation.

Blondel thanked Charpentier, then quietly walked to within a few feet of the girl whose destiny he knew was in his keeping. "Christine," he asked in clear, ringing tones, "did you understand the instructions of Monsieur Charpentier? Answer me!"

"Yes, I understand," she replied instantly.

"Will you obey those instructions?"

"I will."

"Do you know who is talking to you?"

"Monsieur Blondel."

"Remember then you are to recognize no other voice than mine—till I order otherwise. Monsieur Charpentier so commands you and I sternly forbid your heeding any other voice than mine.

In fact, you will be dead to all other sounds. Are you sure you understand?"

"Yes."

"Very well, we shall see if you are as good as your word."

Turning to the audience he asked that two gentlemen volunteer to assist him. Taking these to one side he whispered instructions then requested the audience to observe. One of the volunteers slipped up behind Christine and suddenly let forth a blood-curdling scream that would have honored a Cherokee brave on the warpath. Christine never moved a muscle.

The other went quietly behind her and taking from his pocket a forty-five calibre automatic discharged its contents within two feet of her head. The spectators screamed—but Christine was absolutely impassive. Turning to the audience he quietly remarked, "You evidently are convinced, ladies and gentlemen, that Mademoiselle can not hear." Thanking the volunteers, he dismissed them.

Next, with the double purpose of securing greater mastery of Christine's volition and of gaining the good-will of the spectators, he pro-

ceeded for a half hour to give a demonstration of his own skill that was astounding. Several times the vast assembly was swept from a state of rapt silence to wildly enthusiastic applause, Charpentier chiming in with clapping of hands and an occasional "*brave!*"

Finally, when satisfied that Christine was fully under his control and thoroughly accustomed to his methods, Blondel bade her sit for a moment and rest. Turning to the audience, which had become very demonstrative, Blondel bowed his appreciation several times, then announced:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I have reserved for the climax the most difficult feat of the evening. You have had most ample proof of Monsieur Charpentier's great skill. I desire now to prove to you one of the most astounding phenomena of hypnotism, namely, that Mademoiselle while under my control and acting by my orders is absolutely beyond the reach of Monsieur Charpentier's suggestions. I shall ask Monsieur in a moment to test Mademoiselle and see whether science lies. Remember, please, that he strongly commanded my subject to obey me as sole master. Allow me first, before Monsieur makes test,

to repeat my commands. "Christine," he called out sharply, "you will not forget my instructions: you are to hear no other voice and obey no other commands than mine! Do you understand?"

"Yes," was the spirited reply.

"Will Monsieur kindly see if he can induce Christine to obey him?" Blondel suavely requested, stepping slightly to one side and folding his arms.

Charpentier came forward briskly with the confident air of one bent on demolishing in a twinkling such beautiful scientific reasoning. He was as cock-sure of instantly taking control of Christine's will as a master violinist is certain he can evoke harmonies from his beloved instrument. Halting a few feet in front of her, he looked intently at the girl sitting calmly facing the audience, then snapping his finger cried, "Christine, stand up!"

Christine did not move. There was not even the slightest facial indication she had heard the command of her former master.

Charpentier was astounded, and the spectators hilarious. Mistaking the applause for an accentuation of his failure the Frenchman got con-

fused, stamped his foot and shrieked, "Christine, stand up! *Je te commande!*"

Again absolute impassiveness on the part of Christine.

Heightened applause greatly intensified the hypnotist's embarrassment. His usual suave, self-confident manner deserted him; his face crimsoned; the perspiration stood on his forehead like beads. Quivering with mortification and anger he clenched his hands, stalked right up to the silent figure and leaning forward commanded, urged, threatened her to stand—but all in vain.

Meanwhile Blondel stood a few feet distant, arms folded, muscles of the mouth tightly drawn, brow contracted, features acutely animated and eyes fastened mesmerically upon the miserable young woman whose soul was the prize for which two masterful wills were battling. As Charpentier's failure and embarrassment became more in evidence, Blondel's countenance revealed the supreme joy he felt. Gradually the deep lines in the brow disappeared, the flushed cheeks grew ruddier and a grimly satisfying smile played over his features.

"Perhaps Monsieur does not speak loud enough," he suggested with a shade of sarcasm that convulsed the audience. Charpentier in turn reddened still more, bit his lips and walking in a fury to Christine seized her by both shoulders and shook her delicate form most rudely, at the same time shouting commands: "Christine, stand up! I command you! Charpentier, your master is speaking! Get up!"

His brutal roughness provoked a good many "Ohs" and "Ahs" among the spectators. Blondel, indignant, rushed forward crying "shame!" Face to face the two men stood, glaring into each other's eyes like infuriated beasts.

"Scoundrel!" Blondel cried with vehemence but retaining his self control, "you will never hypnotize Mademoiselle again . . . your evil power over her is at an end . . . I have snatched her from your villainous clutches! Ladies and gentlemen," he continued, stepping toward the audience, "this man is a contemptible scamp. Nine months ago he met Mademoiselle Christine and by treachery gained control of her will. Later he forced her to follow him, and for the past

three months he has held her enslaved, body and soul, nightly exploiting her for base gain!"

"It ees a lie!" shrieked the enraged Frenchman, "Mademoiselle ees paid for her services and accompanies me voluntarily!"

"But I have had her confession in the past two days with all the sordid details of her slavery," calmly replied Blondel.

"It ees a dastardly plot!" yelled the hypnotist, frantically, "and you are one big fraud, Monsieur Blondel! but *diable!* I show you if Christine obey me! You haf played ze game beautifully, Monsieur, but you forgot zhust one little t'ing—aha!" and the wily Frenchman, without another word, proceeded to look intently at Christine and step slowly backward motioning with his hands for her to follow him.

Instantly the blood left Blondel's cheek and he stood for a few seconds dazed. What bitterness to think of victory snatched away at the very moment he felt it secure in his grasp! Oh, why had he failed to make his inhibitions against Charpentier's power all-inclusive! My heart sank within me. What Blondel himself must

have suffered in those few agonizing seconds before he rallied, beggars description.

Suddenly I saw him leap forward as Christine began very slowly turning toward Charpentier. "Christine!" he requested commandingly, "stop! I forbid your recognizing in any manner, by word or will, the influence of your former master! By all that you hold sacred now and hereafter resist his wicked power! Stop, Christine! . . . you cannot rise from this chair! . . . I forbid it absolutely! . . . your limbs are paralyzed! . . . you are helpless! . . . you can not move!"

Nevertheless she did move, very, very slowly toward Charpentier as if drawn by some irresistible, unseen force. And her face! What tragic memories I hold of the struggle between anguish and yearning pictured on her lovely features! Blondel, a few feet off, leaned forward, every nerve keyed to its highest tension, his powerful will strained to the limit. Ten or twelve feet to the left stood Charpentier, silent, his lynx-like eyes seeing nothing but Christine, his arms alternately thrust forward and flexed backward as if

he were pulling some heavy object with an invisible rope.

The situation was agonizing. Not a whisper was heard in the audience. Even the noise of the street seemed strangely hushed. As I bent forward, awaiting anxiously the doubtful issue, my heart thumped like a pile-driver.

I knew that the crisis would come if Christine faced the hypnotist standing. Blondel realized this poignantly and willed with all his might that it must not happen. Suddenly, with manifest intention to confuse Charpentier, enrage him if possible, and thereby lessen his concentration of purpose, he burst forth with a torrent of vituperation, in the midst of which came clear-ringing commands and words of masterful assurance to Christine:

"Scoundrel! Miserable cheat! Rascally miser! Seducer of souls! Your power is at an end! Christine will never obey you! See, she is beyond your reach! Aha! do your worst, damnable knave! Christine will not leave this chair till I command her! . . . Pull, villain, pull, stronger, stronger! . . . Stop, Christine, he is no longer your master . . . he can not draw you one inch

toward him! . . . Aha! caitiff, pull! pull! Arise, Christine, and follow me! . . . see, the hateful spell is broken . . . his tyranny is at an end! . . . Ah, noble girl, repudiate the vile wretch! . . . See, miscreant, she loathes you, turns from you in disgust! . . . Come, noble girl, the fight is almost ended! . . . His hold relaxes! . . . he is helpless! . . . Ah! Christine, at last you are free—come, I give you back your soul which this hell-hound filched!”

As Christine rose and started slowly toward Blondel, Charpentier, with the fury of a lion pouncing on his prey, rushed forward and screaming “traitor!” aimed at Blondel a vicious blow, which was neatly side-stepped. Then before he could regain his poise Blondel swung a clenched right hand at the Frenchman’s chin. As he went to the floor with a thud Blondel turned to the audience, which had risen “en masse” and was cheering wildly. Pulling a warrant from his pocket he waved for silence then cried out: “Officer, here is your warrant. Arrest this man at the instigation of Mademoiselle, who will appear in court tomorrow to prosecute him!”

ETCHINGS

1. NICCOLO'S WAY
2. PRECIOUS ALTERNATIVES
3. MRS. McTEAGUE INTERPOSES

NICCOLO'S WAY

I

From earliest dawn Niccolo had stood at his easel. Never had Federigo known his master to work with such feverish abandon. Food and drink had been disdained, and even a moment's respite from toil denied. A brilliant pageant had passed beneath his window in the Lungarno Acciajoli, and a corps of infantry, fresh from a glorious victory over Pisa, had tramped by amid wild demonstrations of the populace, yet Niccolo had not even deigned to glance through the open window. Several visitors had knocked insistently at the lower door, but Niccolo with a frown and a vigorous shaking of the head had imposed stern silence on his apprentice. The afternoon sun was fast lengthening on the floor its trail of golden light and the remoter corners of the long room were beginning to lose their sharpness of outline, but still the master turned not from his canvas.

At length, stepping back some half dozen paces, Niccolo scrutinized his work with anxious

mien, then glancing at his watch, cried, "What, nearly six! and the picture wants yet the finishing touches—I must hasten!" and stepping forward he plied the brush with still more feverish alacrity. Presently without looking aside he asked: "Federigo, did you not say they promised to come at six?"

"Yes, Master."

"Art sure you did not trust your errand to another? Boy, if you deceive me—" and Niccolo turned to his apprentice with a scowl dark as a storm-cloud brooding over Fiesole.

Federigo trembled, but forthwith answered: "Nay, Master, I delivered the message in person and both promised to come at the stroke of the bell."

Instantly the scowl vanished and the Master turned to his task satisfied, while the frightened youth bent low over his drawing.

"Federigo!"

"Yes, Master."

"Come—stand here where the light strikes full on the faces. Dost know them, boy?"

"Yes, Master, the messages—"

"And do they look happy?"

"Ah, Master, your touch is wonderful! . . . Such lines! . . . and the colors—a miracle of light and shade! . . . What passion! Why, Master, I can almost hear their honeyed exchange of vows!"

"By the gods, boy, cease! You torture me with your prattle!"

Federigo shrank back, abashed. The Master forestalled apology by asking abruptly:

"Federigo, am I accounted ugly?"

"Nay, Master, everyone—"

"Or ill-mannered?"

"Why, sire—"

"Or decrepit?"

"At thirty! You but jest, Master."

"Is a Montorsoli, think you, to be humiliated by an upstart dandy—cozened by a fickle, ungrateful girl and no requital sought?"

Wisely the youth held his tongue.

"Ah, Federigo," the jealous lover cried, gazing sorrowfully at the canvas, "I gave her costly jewels and lavish gold. I clothed her beautiful form in the richest oriental fabrics. I made her room lovelier than the boudoir of a princess, robbing the East of tapestries and rugs and priceless

works of art. I sent her the choicest of wines and the rarest dainties. I left no wish of hers ungratified and asked in return for all—fidelity! And see my recompense! Last night, Federigo, I espied them . . . I heard their sugared words . . . Look, thus they doted on each other! . . . That rapturous smile! . . . His passionate embrace! The deep flush of a cheek I thought none but me had caressed. Oh, my pretty, faithless Nina! . . . The curse of a Montorsoli upon them!”

The huge clock in the Campanile began to strike. Before the echoes of the sixth loud clang had died away a knock was heard at the lower door. Instantly, at a nod from the Master, Federigo left the room. Hastily putting aside his brush and palette, Niccolo covered the canvas, quickly wiped the paint from his fingers and, throwing off his long working apron, turned to the door as Nina, bewitchingly gowned in the daintiest of India muslins and radiant with smiles, swept into the room. Niccolo welcomed her with artfully feigned emotions.

Another knock at the outer door, and presently Federigo ushered in a handsome young Floren-

tine noble, Antonello Bardi. Nina blushed as her host presented the newcomer. Niccolo pretended not to notice.

"Signor Antonello," began the artist suavely, "you are most kind to accept my invitation and to come so promptly."

"To be invited by Niccolo Montorsoli to view a painting in his own studio is a very great honor," replied his guest modestly.

Niccolo bowed low in mock appreciation of the compliment.

"They tell me, Signor Antonello," he continued, blandly, "you love beautiful pictures and have an exquisite taste. I congratulate you. A canvas—I have just finished it—has for me an uncommon interest. However, it portrays a phase of life in which you are far more deeply versed than I, so I beseech your judgment. If, as I hope, you are profoundly impressed—"

"You overwhelm me with responsibility, Master Niccolo!" the youth protested warmly. "I do love beautiful paintings, but I fear you think too highly of my judgment. I am but a tyro, a dilettante—still, since you are kind enough to ask my opinion—"

"Good!" cried Niccolo, rubbing his hands, "it was indeed most gracious in you to come!"

With a woman's keen intuition Nina had already sensed approaching trouble and stood immovable, a numbness at her heart, fearful even to glance at Antonello. Breathlessly she awaited the artist's next move.

Niccolo paused, uncertain whether to prolong the interview. Suddenly, with an ominous shrug of the shoulders, he walked straight to the easel, placed it in the path of the fading light and with a quick movement pulled aside the covering, at the same instant fixing upon the guilty pair a look of fiendish triumph.

Nina glanced at the canvas and shrank back terrified. Antonello's face grew pale as death and instinctively his fingers sought the handle of his jeweled stiletto. Niccolo observed all and was ecstatic.

"How like you my picture, Antonello?" he questioned with biting sarcasm. "Is it not wonderfully true to life? Are not the colors bravely laid on? And the composition—is it not superbly vital? Methinks, though, the lovely creature might have been a trifle less brazen in aban-

don! And the enamoured youth—does he not press his suit too hotly, think you? . . . What, no answer! Ah, Nina, you tremble! . . . and you, Antonello—for shame! Fear you a painted canvas? . . . Look, Nina, the ecstasy on her pretty face! See, Antonello, how rapturously he folds her in his arms! . . . Was the like ever painted before?”

While the crafty artist talked, centering all interest on the canvas, he was stealthily approaching Antonello. Suddenly, with a tiger's spring he leaped on his unwary victim, a stiletto clenched in his up-raised hand, and hissing triumphantly, “It is Niccolo's way with all rivals!” plunged the keen steel to the hilt in Antonello's breast.

PRECIOUS ALTERNATIVES

II

Any young woman of twenty-five, situated as Miriam DeForest had been for seven monotonous years, would have been deeply touched by such a question. Why should she remain apparently unmoved? Beginning with the shabby sofa, on which she and Paul LeBrun were sitting, her eyes quickly surveyed the contents of the dingy room—parlor of a cheap city boarding house—then centered on the expectant features of the man sitting at her left. Deliberate, restrained, keyed to a note of hopeless regret, came her answer.

"Of course, Paul, I'd like to leave this place, but what's the use? Other boarding houses I can afford are just as uninviting, and it takes money to move. Don't tantalize me . . . you know how it's been . . . please let's have no phantom hopes!"

"I'm too deadly in earnest for that, Miriam; remember I've come all the way from Brazil to

get your answer. Wont you leave this place and go back with me?"

"But, Paul, you don't understand—"

"I don't want to understand—I just want you, Miriam."

"But you forget—mother."

"No, Miriam, I expect her to go with us."

"Why, Paul, it might kill her! She's too frail—I'm afraid she couldn't stand such a trip. And to leave the old home with its thousand memories of father, part forever with old friends and long-familiar scenes—Paul, I believe she'd die of a broken heart before reaching land."

"I can't see it that way, Miriam. Of course, the break with hallowed associations would wrench her heart a bit—but the ocean trip, think what a world of good it would do her! And the climate in Brazil where my company has ordered me to locate, is extremely mild—it would help her wonderfully!"

"Thank you for your goodness; but it's really too risky, Paul. And besides . . . if she could make the trip safely, I . . . that is . . . well, we both feel . . . you know, Paul, mother

hasn't anything in the world except what I can give her," and Miriam lowered her eyes as if the admission meant disgrace.

"Oh, I see, it's pride—rank family pride! So we're to be haunted by the pale phantom of ante-bellum aristocracy! Miriam, isn't it time you and your mother were done with that sort of thing? Of course, I don't blame you for honoring the past: I know the heroic part your ancestors played in Tennessee history and it's something to be proud of. But times have changed, you remember. They are dead, by most people forgotten, and the family estate long since wiped out. And here you've been for seven stupid years . . . buried alive in this dreary boarding house, a veritable slave—few pleasures, no luxuries, saving every possible cent to be lavished on your mother—"

"But, Paul, I haven't the least regret for anything I've done for mother, and I want you to know it!"

Miriam spoke with very pronounced convictions.

"I'm quite sure you don't, Miriam—it's just like you to give yourself unstintedly. To some

souls sacrifice is just as essential as oxygen to the lungs, and while it has kept me from happiness I honor you for the beautiful devotion you've shown. But the point is, it isn't necessary for you to make such sacrifices any longer. I have a good position, have put aside a few thousands for emergency and can take loving care of you both. Wont you let me?"

"I've no right, Paul, to impose on you the burden of caring for my invalid mother—"

"Right! For heaven's sake, Miriam, waive all thought of rights! Didn't you tell me just now you had no regrets for all the sacrifices you'd made? Evidently you've considered it a sweet privilege to slave for your mother. What about me? Surely you don't doubt I love you! Can't you see how I'd count it a privilege to do all this—for your sake?"

"Of course, Paul, still it's different in your case . . . remember she's my mother—all I have to live for."

"All you have! Then I don't count?"

"Oh, Paul, you know I didn't mean it that way—I mean she's all of my own flesh and blood."

"But I can't see any very vital difference, Miriam. If you find happiness in sacrificing for one you love, why deny me the happiness I should find in doing the same thing? Isn't the logic sound?"

"I guess so—but, Paul, mother would fret dreadfully. I simply don't believe she could reconcile herself to it. Of course, she doesn't mind looking to me for everything. You see, I'm just paying her back, or trying to, for all she did for me long ago. But if matters came to the pass—that is, if she found she was dependent on you for bread and clothes and shelter, she'd chafe so I—"

"My God, Miriam, is our love to be blighted by an eternal kow-towing to ancestral memories! What if she was a Claborne? I reverence that name, but if what you say is true, I abominate the false pride that would drive a mother to rob such a daughter as you of long-deserved happiness! Miriam, will you submit to it? Love pleads eloquently against useless sacrifices, and this seems to me unnecessary. Can't you see a chasm is yawning between us? After years of hard labor I've worked my way to independ-

ence, and now on my leave of absence I've come thousands of miles on the strength of the fond chance you'd marry me and, accompanied by your mother, go to South America with me. We're no longer kids in the puppy-love stage: we have a proved affection for each other refined by years of separation. Why allow the alleged scruples of your mother to stand longer between us? I feel it's wrong, Miriam, and, if you trust your heart, you'll say so, too. Then think what you've had to put up with—seven of the best years of your life in this dowdy place, a drudge, a hack, a sort of social gnome without personal pleasures and luxuries! But for the joy that has been yours through sacrifice, I shudder for what might have been! This hideous drudgery should end. I can give you and your mother a home, protection, more than the mere comforts of life. All that balks us is this pale ghost of family pride, this fantastic conceit of ancestry, this ultra-thickening of old aristocratic southern blood! Miriam, will you let it cheat us out of love? For the sake of a mere shibboleth will you stand by resignedly while dead hands lay their clammy fingers on our lives?"

As Paul LeBrun pleaded his cause impassionedly Miriam sat with folded hands, her eyes fixed on a spot in the gaudy, frayed carpet at her feet. What overpowering emotions surged through her heart! What fateful clashings of love and pride! Sweet visions of home, husband, children, an aging mother freed from pinching wants, confusedly blending with phantoms of a remote past—broad, fertile estates tended by slaves, colonial mansions luxuriously furnished and peopled with beautiful, haughty women, proud-spirited men and handsome children, all oblivious to the very thought of poverty, disdainful of vulgar effort and scornful of accepting favors at the hand of strangers. What a galaxy of loveliness and chivalry! Why will the lustrous memories of ancestral days persist in haunting her? What taint still lurked in the blood poisoning her mind against the sweet yearnings of her soul? Why should the dead past impose on the living such cringing obligations? Silly that she and her mother, scions of aristocracy though they were, should imagine their own blue-bloodedness above playing fief to the clean red-bloodedness of one who, perhaps,

did not know the name of his maternal grandfather! And yet—.

"I'm waiting for your answer," a resonant voice called.

Miriam looked up dazed. Shuddering, she brushed the back of her hand across her face then spoke with quavering voice:

"Oh, what dreadful things I've just been seeing! Paul, I do so want to say yes . . . I yearn as fondly as you for the happiness we've dreamed, but the pale face of little mother back in the old village home where she's lived since father's death will not down. Every time I try to say yes she frowns and shakes her head. How can I? . . . O how can I?"

"Great God, Miriam, must I give you up? Does this mean you can't accept my offer?"

"If it was just me, Paul, you know how glad I'd be to accept, for I love you better than—"

"Anything except family pride!" he hurled at her, bitterness of soul mastering for the moment his passion.

Miriam bit her lips and the tears gathered.

"That's very unkind, Paul. Can't you see it isn't *my* pride that makes me hesitate, but

mother's? Oughtn't I to know her better than you? Surely you would not have me kill her! She simply couldn't be happy, Paul—with such a nature she'd shrivel up and die like a fragile flower when the frost touches it."

"But maybe you're just transferring to her by a natural fallacy of judgment your own feelings. Remember, Miriam, she hasn't many years to live—in fact, she may leave you at any moment. Wont it mean everything to her to know she can have you with her all the time? Surely, for this alone, she will be content to swallow family pride!"

"Of course, Paul, for my sake she'd consent and try to uproot the past with never a complaint . . . but her heart would die by inches—of wounded pride!"

"Do you solemnly believe this, Miriam?"

"Yes, Paul. I do—blood is thicker than water. You know we're just quotations from our ancestors."

"Maybe so," he flung back, bitterness of soul still rampant, "but to me your mother seems more like an unabridged edition!"

The irony fell with the cruel force of a blud-

geon. Without a word Miriam crumpled up. Putting her face in her lap she wept bitterly.

"Forgive me, Miriam," Paul pleaded tenderly, aware that he had allowed his feelings to betray him, "I really didn't mean to be cruel—my temper got the best of me. You see, I come of plain stock. My people on both sides of the family for many generations have been just ordinary folks, hard-working and God-fearing. My veins haven't a drop of blue blood, so I can't easily comprehend your—that is, your mother's aristocratic scruples about family pride and independence. It seems to me, Miriam, if she really loves you she'd be willing to make some sacrifices herself for your happiness."

"And she would, Paul; don't for a moment think her unworthy of that! As I told you before, she'd never raise a protest, yet I know the daily reminders of a proud independence lost forever would slowly eat away her heart.

Have I the right to buy happiness for myself at such a price? Would you, Paul?"

"Of course, Miriam, as I can't see matters from your angle I'd better not answer your question."

A pause, while both felt stealing over them the chill of despair. Miriam sat with hands tensely clasped, Paul with closed eyes and brain all awlirl.

"Miriam," the silence was broken by a question hoarsely phrased, "hasn't the issue narrowed to this—your mother's pride or me?"

"Yes, Paul . . . oh, it's terrible to have to choose between such precious alternatives! Can't you see, dear, my heart is torn and bleeding? Pity me for God's sake! If I choose love and happiness—How my poor heart cries for it!—I must forswear all a mother expects of her only prop and begin the weaving of her shroud. Would you have me on such terms? Paul, could you really be happy with one who for her own love's sake consciously hastened the death of a doting mother?"

Paul held his peace.

"Better a thousand times that we part with love unrequited than buy happiness with the mintage of her soul!"

Paul still held his peace, brooding darkly on the wreck of his eager hopes. "So it's come to this," he mused, "after years of working and

waiting—Miriam has rejected me! Illusion of duty? God forbid I should judge her! Alone again . . . alone . . . alone in a strange clime . . . and just drab existence . . . not even clean hope! O God!”

“Miriam,” he spoke in low, quavering tones, “I came here believing you would marry me. Duty, you say, forbids. It’s hateful as death to go back without you—yet there is no alternative. Forgive me if I seem insensitive to scruples so dear to you—I really want to be generous, but our veins, you know, run different kinds of blood. Life now has very little to offer me . . . I can but try to drown despair in still harder work. Of course, I had planned to stay indefinitely, that is, until after—our marriage. You have made that impossible, so it’s better that I go at once—to stay longer would just torture us both . . . Miriam,” his voice broke as he rose and held out his hand, “if I never see you again, remember I shall die blessing you! Good by!”

“Good by, Paul, good by!” she sobbed broken-heartedly, trying in vain through blinding tears to see him as he walked to the door. A

click of the lock and he was gone. For a moment she stood, love and duty struggling for supremacy. Duty conquered, and throwing herself on the sofa she sought relief in a torrent of wild tears.

MRS. McTEAGUE INTERPOSES

III

Everybody admitted—even the men—that the Hon. Reginald Montfort was exceedingly popular with the ladies. What else expect when a man, this side of thirty, strikingly handsome, always immaculate in dress and gracious in manner is gifted with eloquence that sweeps at will the gamut of human emotions? Scant wonder, as he mounted the carpeted platform and faced a hundred pairs of feminine eyes, he should be tinglingly aware—strange masculine instinct!—of the secret homage accorded him.

No motley throng was that assembled. The religious, intellectual and social elite of the city composed the Woman's Branch of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, the general counsel of which was the aforesaid Hon. Reginald Montfort, present by appointment to submit his final report and press for favorable recognition the resolutions he had introduced at the previous meeting.

The address of the distinguished attorney

consumed forty-five minutes and evoked rounds of applause. A score or more of brief speeches warmly commended it. Only two or three timid spirits raised mild objection.

"Question! Question!" a dozen voices called out, assured that nothing else was worth the saying.

Instantly the presiding officer arose, smiling with benignant satisfaction.

"Madame President!" came a voice clear and insistent, as a woman who had been sitting on the front row to the President's right rose and awaited recognition.

"Mrs. McTigue," graciously acknowledged the President, resuming her seat.

"Before the question is put to vote," courteously demanded the speaker, a tall, simply but elegantly dressed matron of forty-five, "hear the words of a mother of two grown daughters who, perhaps, doesn't love her own flesh and blood more than many mothers of the poor girls whose lives will be poignantly affected by your vote. I have listened with respectful attention to the supplementary report of our attorney. His recommendations are unequivocal and his con-

clusions evidently acceptable to the majority—if I may judge from the sentiments expressed. But, Madame President, before we commit ourselves inevitably should we not be morally certain that the measures proposed at least are ethically expedient? And yet, what flattering unction have we applied to our conscience and reason whereby we lightly persuade ourselves that as a city we can effect what other cities have signally failed to compass? Is our citizenship really so superior? Are the local conditions, as you have heard them defined, distinguishingly peculiar? Ah, Madame President, I fear we are about to divorce head and heart—and that way lies disaster!

“I am no apologist for vice, nevertheless I hold that social outcasts—betrayed, misguided, delinquent womanhood—at least expect from us who make and enforce the laws the same toleration, the exact condemnation, no more, we mete out to those of the opposite sex who are their co-partners in guilt. What’s sauce for the gander should be sauce for the goose. The recommendations, on the contrary, seem to me grossly partisan, brutally inconsiderate of femi-

nine needs. Remember, Madame, it is so easy for respectability to play the Pharisee! Alas, how few are quick to act the good Samaritan! These poor, wretched creatures—”

“Madame President,” cried an irate member, taking the floor, “will the speaker pardon a question?”

“Certainly,” responded Mrs. McTeague, without awaiting intervention of the Chair.

“Do I understand you to take the side of the shameless, brazen women who flaunt vice in our faces, mock at virtue and seduce our young men to immoral deeds?”

A murmur of applause rippled through the audience.

“If Jesus were here today—in our city—at this meeting,” quietly answered Mrs. McTeague, “I wonder which side he’d take? Aren’t these women our sisters? Yet, apparently, we are not content to close our doors against them, to ostracize them from society—we spurn them even in thought! And now we would drive them from us as a pack of she-wolves! And, alas, how little we’ve done to reclaim them!”

“Reclaim! what’s the use wasting further

time and money on them?" flashed back the questioner. "Haven't they wilfully put themselves beyond the pale of social redemption? All they want is to be let alone—like the spider, to entice more flies into his web!"

Applause from various portions of the house.

"What we propose doing is to destroy utterly the web—at least in this city!"

"And drive the wicked spider to some other city? Is that really fair to the other city—and to the spider?"

"That's not our concern—other cities must look after themselves. It's our business to purge this city of immoral—spiders, if you please, and I for one believe the resolutions, if enforced, will accomplish that end."

"Maybe so—but for how long? A month? Two months? A year? Then what? And suppose some other city tries the same expedient; sha'n't we get paid back in our own debased coin? Are you certain the laws can be enforced—permanently, that is? Quite sure you can count on a solidarity of persistent effort? Ah, Madame, human nature is very perverse! I fear the scheme will merely whip the devil round a

stump; will just scotch the snake—never kill it!”

“Better scotch it then even for a month than have it bite more of our precious boys!”

Louder applause from the audience.

“Madame,” replied Mrs. McTeague, setting her lips firmly and speaking with impassioned earnestness, “I need but remind you of the parable of the seven devils that returned to find the house swept and garnished. Your arguments seem dictated solely by your heart. You appeal to sentiment, not reason. You ignore century-old causes, you propose to deal with sordid effects as though their roots lay along the surface, not deeply imbedded in ten thousand years of unregenerate human nature. I join you and every other woman present in deploring the social evil—deploring it beyond the power of words to define—but I differ radically in the application of means. To me the resolutions seem heartless, a mere temporary expedient, a juggling with ultimates. They look like a big band-stand play to popular sentiment, a quick bid for superficial favor among the well-to-do. But what about the wretched objects of our loathing—those miserable creatures from the

slums, who never had a chance at decent living; and those pretty, helpless moths who seem to love the flames; and, too, those dupes of a too-trusting affection, easy quarry too often for the scions of respectability—?”

“Madame President,” cried another irate woman, leaping to her feet, “must we listen to more of this mawkish sentiment? Hasn’t enough been said already for these abandoned creatures, these flittering bats, these prowling vampires that have fed fat on many precious lives?”

“I thank Madame for striking the key-note!” retorted Mrs. McTeague in a voice of commanding pitch. “‘Abandoned creatures!’ That’s it exactly—social castaways, derelicts—more sinned against than sinning, martyrs of man’s stark brutality! And society—you and I and other respectable folk—having thrown them on the dung-heap would now conspire to keep them there! Beautiful expression of the Christ-like, isn’t it!”

“But doesn’t the Bible say, ‘Let him that is filthy be filthy still’?”

“The Devil can quote scripture, remember.”

"And you have the face to deny the fact that most of these—these shameless wantons have deliberately, wilfully chosen the path—."

"Stop, Madame, be not guilty of such heresy! Your sex should teach a broader charity. Is it ignorance or prejudice that prompts you to use the words 'wilful,' 'deliberate,' of these unfortunate creatures? If the former, I bid you investigate. If the latter, I beg God's mercy on you! Ah, Madame, Madame, tame the beast that is in man, then there'll be no social evil!"

"I protest, Madame President," cried another angry member, "against the specious attempt to excuse these gilded profligates at the expense of our sons and husbands!"

"Madame President," suavely queried the Hon. Reginald Montfort, arising, "may I ask the speaker a few questions?"

"I consent, Madame President," instantly responded Mrs. McTeague, facing her interlocutor unflinchingly.

"Will Madame kindly state specifically why she objects to my resolutions?"

"In the first place, sir, I consider them un-Christian. In the second place, they probe in

the wrong direction; they can never get at the real causes of the evils we would correct. In the third place, they fly in the face of municipal precedent, and you as an attorney must know it. In the last place, they seem most artfully adapted to the winning of a transient victory, one that will apply an anodyne to the public conscience and superinduce the flattering conviction that this city has been smart enough to solve the riddle of social evil."

"But doesn't Madame admit, from all the evidence adduced, that the local situation really demands redress?"

"Certainly—but is the evidence all in? Has the other side yet presented its case? It really seems to me, sir, we've been looking at the matter from the selfish standpoint of so-called respectable society!"

"And, pray, why does Madame invest her words with such manifest sarcasm?"

"To express, what else, my personal opinion of so-called respectable society, which, living in a glass house, has been throwing entirely too many stones!"

"Madame President," screamed a half dozen women in frenzied unison:

"This is an insult to decency!"

"An outrage!"

"A vile affront to society!"

"I denounce such scurrilous insinuations!"

"Abominable words!"

"Question! Question!" cried a babel of voices from all quarters of the room.

The Hon. Reginald Montfort grandiosely took his seat smugly self-satisfied. Mrs. Muriel McTeague faced her wrathful critics with flashing eyes, her Irish blood pulsing at fever heat.

"Madame President, I still have the floor!" she cried, imperiously. "A few words yet and I shall have done, then vote as you will! I came here this morning, prepared after long study and years of connection with the Florence Crittenden Home, to discuss calmly proposals that I deem iniquitous. The privilege has been ruthlessly denied me. At every turn I've been questioned, hectoring, misunderstood—and by women whom I rate my superiors neither intellectual nor social. Frankly, I can not comprehend this callous attitude toward social outcasts, who really have

enormous claims on society because society, in most instances, has made them what they are. And what right, human or divine, have we, the elite, the gentry, the reputed aristocracy of mind and heart, to make broad our phylacteries, to wrap about us the flowing garments of Pharisaic self-righteousness and spurn with scornful pity the bedizened creatures of the under-world? Alas, for the passing of our faith in *noblesse oblige*! Seemingly we've forgotten the divine injunction—"Condemn not that ye be not condemned!" Ladies, are we quite certain no skeletons are rattling in our closets? No blots on our escutcheons? We who've been casting stones, are we sure our own households are without sin?

"Madame President, it may not generally be known that my husband's business demands the constant employment of detectives—."

A strange silence instantly pervaded the audience.

"Ah, I see you divine already why I have such utter contempt for our high society—I know entirely too much about its sordidness! And it is this society, mind you, leprous with hypocrisy, that is backing to the limit the vicious reso-

lutions formulated by our counsel—blind leaders of the blind!

“Sensing the need of drastic measures to defeat these odious proposals, I requested my husband to furnish me ample data about the private lives of certain men and women whose names are writ large on the social register of the city. An execrable advantage, you brand it? That’s as it may—but you hounded me to it, remember, and put me to extreme shift to gain the sympathy of those present who I believe reverence decency and justice, for, thank God, our so-called respectable society isn’t altogether hypocritical in its pretensions! Ladies, I observe,” and she swept the up-turned faces with swift vision, “at least seven women whose—but I simply can not out with it, the woman in me revolts!” and she paused, sickened by nauseating thoughts.

“Madame President,” she requested, quickly regaining her poise, “with your permission I desire to ask the Hon. Reginald Montfort, our very distinguished counsel, our redoubtable leader, may I say, our valiant Sir Galahad, if he denies owning a piece of property, a three-story

brick apartment, at the corner of Eighty-first Street and Quentin Avenue, which for a half dozen years or more has been used for clandestine purposes?"

Instantly every eye was riveted on the man so unexpectedly accused, who sat dazed and tongue-tied.

"Again, I ask the honorable gentleman if he denies the betrayal, ten years ago, of a poor girl, nameless here, whom finally he cast adrift and who now—?"

"This is an outrage!" cried the exasperated attorney, jumping to his feet.

"Does the honorable gentleman deny the charges? Then I go tomorrow to the papers with crushing evidence of guilt!" threatened Mrs. McTeague boldly.

"A pack of fools!" hissed the humiliated man, seizing his hat and rushing madly from the room.

"Madame President," quietly remarked Mrs. McTeague, facing the pallid woman on the platform, "I call for the question."

THE SPIRIT WIFE

"Just in time, Bailey," a cheery voice announced as I opened the door and glimpsed Blondel astride his favorite chair, "had about concluded you would arrive too late."

"Mere luck that your message caught me—but what's up?"

"Something rather unusual, and for you devilishly unfortunate. Here, read this" and diving into his pocket he pulled out a letter and flipped it toward me.

Blondel was no joker. I knew that well, so felt a twinge of uneasiness as I picked up the envelope. A quick glance at the handwriting startled me. "Why had she written to Blondel?" I queried mentally, prompted by curiosity rather than by jealousy. "Devilishly unfortunate!" What could he mean? If anything serious had happened wouldn't she have phoned me at once?

Another quick glance at Blondel sitting imperturbable, his arms crossed, his chin resting on arms, and I had the letter unfolded.

"Well, any doubt about what's up?" he asked, with quiet complacency, as I finished reading.

"No—and isn't it an unfortunate mix-up!"

"Yes, devilishly unfortunate—still it might be worse."

"How so?"

"Suppose the daughter, your fiancée, were to—."

"Absurd, Blondel, she has too much good sense!"

"Don't blame you, old man, for thinking so, still there's a possibility and we mustn't take any risks."

"Amen to that!—But what if the medium is a genuine psychic?"

"Must be determined quickly."

"In which case, do you think the seances harmful to Mr. Harrallton?"

"Idle discussion, Bailey. Wait till we know the medium then we can rationally conjecture. Miss Harrallton, by appointment, will be here in a few minutes, and I want some information from you first. How long since her mother died?"

"Let me see—this is the fifteenth—two months next Sunday."

"Do you know whether Mr. and Mrs. Harrallton were happily married?"

"So far as I could judge, yes."

"Was she an attractive woman?"

"Decidedly—had a lovely personality."

"Any reason to suppose they were ever temporarily estranged?"

"Yes, six or seven years ago Mrs. Harrallton became insanely jealous of her husband's supposed attentions to another woman. There was talk of a separation—but the other woman suddenly left the city and a reconciliation was made."

"Is Mr. Harrallton what you call a religious man?"

"Intensely so—on some subjects he is almost a fanatic."

"Any idea whether he reads Swedenborg?"

"Reckon he does; I've noticed several of his books on the library table."

"Any books on modern spiritualism?"

"Yes, I remember seeing some by Myers,

Lodge, Barrett—and I think by Doyle and Flammarion.”

“Do you know if he ever—but,” as a timid knock was heard, “she’s at the door now,” he whispered, “you’d better step into the rear room; she’ll talk more freely if you aren’t present.”

As Blondel walked to the door I entered the adjoining room none too well pleased at the thought of playing eaves-dropper. However, as she evidently had reasons for not taking me into confidence, I could do nothing but await her pleasure.

“Mr. Blondel,” she began when seated, “I feel deeply humiliated by the conditions that forced me to ask this appointment. But my father has been acting so strangely—and I’ve heard Mr. Bailey speak so often of you I felt that you could help me.”

“I’ll be delighted to serve you if it’s possible.”

“Thank you ever so much. My letter, did it—that is, was it definite enough?”

“Yes, I think I grasp the situation—still—.”

“Mr. Blondel, do you believe in mediums?”

“Well—yes and no. Perhaps I can answer

best by asking if you believe in physicians? There are quacks, you know, in all professions."

"But do you really believe they can call up spirits?"

"Frankly, I don't know. Much evidence of a singularly strange nature and the unequivocal testimony of many eminent scientists seem to prove it. But before we discuss such matters I prefer to have fuller details about your father's case. Can you tell me how soon after your mother's death he paid his first visit to the medium?"

"No, but I'm quite certain he's been going for the past four weeks. Here is a letter that I found crumpled in the waste basket nearly five weeks ago, when I was searching for one I had misplaced."

Blondel read the contents very carefully, repeating aloud certain portions, on which he commented briefly: 'The blessed Lord has endowed me with the miraculous gift of communion with departed spirits;' 'The old, old gag to catch the unwary;' 'and I feel quite certain—.' 'These psychic quacks are always dead sure;' 'I can cause the spirit of your beloved wife to

materialize—to commune with her will be bliss—if you will come to my home some evening—.’

“Sounds altogether like rank fraud, Miss Harallton,” he asserted, returning the letter.

“Oh, my poor father!”

“I’m afraid he is to be pitied. But tell me, have you noticed of late anything unusual in his manner?”

“Yes, he has seemed very restless and uneasy . . . several times I have caught him looking at me queerly . . . once he seemed just on the point of telling me something, but he checked himself, arose hastily and left the room.”

“And you think he’s been repeating the visits each week? Maybe he’s been going to the Club—perhaps the Directors’ meeting?”

“No, I am positive he hasn’t—he’s never had the habit of going out at night, and until the past few weeks never left home after supper without telling mother or me where he was going.”

“Doubtless your surmise is true. . . . Does he go out more than once a week?”

“Regularly now on Tuesday and Friday.”

"Let me see—this is Wednesday; had you retired last evening when he returned?"

"No—and he seemed quite beside himself . . . there was such a strange look in his eyes!"

"Indeed! This fellow Clementine is evidently no tyro. By the way, does your father ever make excuses for leaving?"

"Not until last night, when he seemed to think I suspected something."

"I suppose he gets home about the same time after each visit?"

"Yes, nearly always at ten-thirty."

"To satisfy yourself, why didn't you get someone to shadow his movements?"

"I couldn't bear the thought of asking one of the servants or, hiring a detective . . . and I hated to let Allen—I mean Mr. Bailey—know my suspicions. He's always seemed to admire my father so—."

Mentally I registered a full-grown interrogation point.

"And besides, I felt morally certain."

"Quite natural—still I wish you had told Mr. Bailey; he could have proved or disproved your fears."

Miss Harrallton vouchsafed no comment. As for me—I couldn't begin to fathom her motives, so felt a bit peeved.

"Has it occurred to you, Miss Harrallton, that your father may be going to the seances through mere curiosity—or as an investigator of psychic phenomena?"

"Don't you think he'd have discussed the matter in that event? We've often talked about spiritualism—that is, before mother's death, and he has ten or a dozen books on the subject. For the past two months, however, he hasn't broached the matter."

"Then you conclude he is a convert to spirit materialization?"

"I see no other alternative."

"Since he believes he's been communing with the spirit of your mother, why hasn't he spoken to you and asked you to go and see for yourself?"

"He has been on the point of telling me several times, I feel sure, but he remembers how strongly I opposed spiritualism when we used to discuss it, so I guess he thought it useless"

"Very plausible. By the way, before I for-

get please give me this Clementine's address."

"Number 1239 37th Street."

Blondel copied the memorandum in his notebook, mused a few moments, then asked:

"Miss Harrallton, would you not like to attend one of the seances—in disguise, of course?"

"Oh, no—it's too horrible to think of!"

"But, remember your father's predicament. If he's the victim of fraud, as seems the case, he should be disillusioned—and quickly."

"Why can't you go to him, Mr. Blondel, and on the authority of an expert—?"

"Utterly out of the question, Miss Harrallton! If he thinks he has seen spirits materialize, he would strongly resent my coming, repudiate without hesitancy any explanation I might present and dub me an arrant meddler . . . No, that won't do—you are the real key to the situation and far more than anyone else can help dispel the illusion, once you are absolutely convinced of Clementine's duplicity."

"I wish I could think so."

"Moreover, so long as you aren't convinced, and merely rely on what I say, there is a chance—quack mediums are wonderfully resourceful

—that in time you may come to side with your father.”

“Are there any genuine mediums, Mr. Blondel—I mean mediums that can really commune with the dead?”

“Have you read any of the authorities—Myers, Crookes, Lodge, Podmore, Hyslop, Holt, Flammarion, Barrett, and a dozen others?”

“Just merely sketched a few of them.”

“Then I’d better not attempt to answer your question categorically.”

“But do you believe mediums can cause spirits to materialize?”

“Frankly, after careful investigation covering twenty-five years I’ve never witnessed an instance of genuine spirit materialization; still such eminent scientists as Lodge, Crookes, Myers, Flammarion—not to mention others—assert unqualified belief in the phenomena.”

“Then if I went to the seance you think there’s a possibility I—?”

“Pardon me—I mean to hold out no such hope. In fact, I feel morally certain in this instance you will witness a clever hoax at your father’s expense. A genuine medium, one that

really invites investigation by experts would hardly think of locating in the neighborhood you mention. I know the community well . . . it has no savory reputation . . . is just the place for a gang of fakes and swindlers."

"My poor father!"

"Yes, he does deserve pity; most likely he's in the clutches of an unscrupulous set of rascals who are bleeding him heavily."

"I see nothing else except to follow your suggestion . . . I will go to the seance, Mr. Blondel."

"Very well; I really advise this, although I must warn you that the experience may be harrowing."

"For my dear father's sake I will be brave."

"As I must not accompany you, I think you should explain everything to Mr. Bailey and ask him to be escort. We will call Friday evening a little before eight. Wear a long coat and heavy veil. I will manage the disguise for Mr. Bailey."

The details satisfactorily arranged, Miss Harrallton expressed her gratitude, then withdrew.

"Bailey, I ought to warn you," Blondel re-

marked seriously, as he once more straddled his chair, "there's a risk in taking Miss Harrallton to the seance."

"Then why in thunder did you advise her to go?"

"For the simple reason if she sees through the hoax she can quite easily convince her father."

"Well, where's the risk—you don't mean—?"

"Of course not—no personal danger. Listen; when fake mediums uncover an extraordinary chance to gouge some well-to-do patron they run to extreme lengths in order to stimulate reality where spirit materialization is concerned. I have known them to bribe servants, even photographers, for the purpose of securing photographs of deceased parents or children. If this rascal Clementine has managed to secure a photograph of Mrs. Harrallton I'll wager against odds he'll parade a fake materialization so startlingly deceptive as to unnerve Miss Harrallton, the more so as the darkened room in itself will tend to give a highly-wrought imagination full play. You'd better watch her carefully. If you see she is getting excited, do anything you can to distract her attention."

"But after what you told her I can't figure out how she can possibly be fooled."

"You've no idea, Bailey, how very seductive a good fake seance is. I dare say before it's all over you'll feel half-convinced yourself."

"Maybe so, maybe not—anyhow, I'll take your advice and keep my peepers open for trouble."

By agreement, I called at Blondel's early Friday evening so he could arrange my disguise. Promptly at seven-fifty we left Mr. Harrallton's home and a few minutes after eight the taxi dropped us at the corner, a half block from the medium's home. Blondel went ahead. When we had paid our two dollars and been admitted we found some thirty other people, among them Mr. Harrallton, who sat on the front row.

The room was about fifty feet by twenty, and dimly lighted. A heavy cord, stretched across the room, four or five feet in front of the first row of chairs, marked off a section about eighteen feet by twenty, which was covered by a heavy Brussels carpet of dark, unfigured pattern. The only objects visible were a cabinet about five feet square and seven feet high with

a glass-paneled door and a table covered with a dark green cloth. The walls were alabastined in dark blue and the ceiling paneled, the panels being about three feet by six.

I had finished these random observations and was musing on the strangeness of the situation when the medium, accompanied by his manager, walked forward into the carpeted space and faced the audience. The medium was evidently a foreigner, and while the manager in very unctuous tones addressed the small crowd, he stood with head inclined as if half asleep:

"Ladies and gentlemen, in behalf of Signor Clementine I desire to thank you for your presence this evening. The Signor has just communicated to me the good news that he feels this is going to be a most auspicious occasion for getting 'en rapport' with the blessed spirits. He begs me to implore your kind assistance. Please keep perfectly quiet; do not engage in conversation; try to divest your thoughts of all base, material considerations; and pray to the good Father above for true spiritual enlightenment. Inasmuch as certain skeptical persons always attend these seances, I desire now, in the

interest of genuine spiritual science, to invite any doubters to come forward and make minute examination of the cabinet, the table, the walls, the ceiling and floor before Signor Clementine is bound in the cabinet."

Blondel and some half dozen others accepted the invitation. They inspected the table, picked up the cabinet and set it elsewhere, thumped the walls, sounded the floor and returned to their seats apparently satisfied there was no possibility of trickery.

The manager then requested three of the strongest men in the audience to come forward and tie the medium in the cabinet. When this had been accomplished the lights were turned on for a moment and the cabinet door opened that the spectators might see the medium bound securely in his chair and this lashed to the floor by strong ropes.

Shutting the door and turning to an electric switch at the far end of the enclosed space the manager, remarked casually, as he plunged the room in inky blackness: "I must remind you that spirits will not materialize in a lighted room, also that they love the benign influence of music." In

a moment he started a Swiss music box that must have been placed somewhere in the cabinet. What became of him afterward I could not determine.

The suspense that followed soon became distressing in the extreme. Although I strained my eyes to the limit, the darkness was so intense I could not even distinguish the forms of cabinet or table. Absolute silence prevailed. The ticking of my watch was easily perceptible, and at times I imagined I could hear my heart thumping. Miss Harrallton was evidently affected, for I felt her arm trembling violently.

Suddenly, out of the uncanny silence I heard a low moan as if within the cabinet. Another followed shortly. At once there appeared in mid-air, very dimly outlined, what seemed an arm bared to the elbow. In a twinkling it was gone. Following another moan coming from the cabinet appeared two forearms, up near the ceiling, which for a moment assumed a beckoning attitude, then disappeared.

A genuine shudder—so startling were the weird appearances, while Miss Harrallton tightened her hold of my arm in a manner that be-

spoke abject terror. In less time than it takes to write this sentence a dim, shadowy form came into view near the rear wall, moved forward slowly and when half-way to the cord lifted draped arms appealingly—then melted away.

At this moment Blondel, who had found a seat just behind me, leaned forward to whisper something in my ear. Before I caught a word Miss Harrallton gave my arm so violent a jerk as to pull me half-way out of the chair. Turning quickly forward I perceived instantly what caused her agitation. On the floor in front of the cabinet was a glowing, phosphorescent ball-like mass about two and one-half feet in diameter that seemed to revolve in some inexplicable manner, growing larger each moment. Presently it approximated the human form. Presto! and the apparition, clearly distinguished as a woman, moved majestically forward, arms outstretched and eyes directed seemingly toward someone who sat at my left. .

Suddenly a piercing cry broke the stillness, "O my darling wife!" Almost frantic with apprehension, I bent sidewise to speak the comforting words my fears prompted, but before I

voiced a syllable the vise-like grip on my arm relaxed, Miss Harrallton sprang to her feet and, arms extended, shrieked, "My precious mother! O God, let me go to her!"

Instantly I seized her by the arm and pulled her back to the chair. The "spirit" meanwhile stood placidly gazing at the ecstatic woman until, lifting its arms in benediction, it seemed to whisper "peace" and faded away. Again Miss Harrallton lunged forward, and moaning, "Oh, God, she's gone!" fell over in a swoon.

With Blondel's help I lifted her outdoors, where we were joined by Mr. Harrallton. No explanations were offered on either side, although the situation was tense. Fortunately, the bracing November air quickly revived the fainting woman, so Blondel returned to the seance. When the taxi for which I had 'phoned drew up we entered and drove straight to Mr. Harrallton's, where I bade him and his daughter good night.

Naturally I went to Blondel's. He had not returned so I paced the floor restlessly for an hour. At ten-thirty he stalked in and, seeing me, blurted out in disgust, "Haven't we played hell!"

"Yes, haven't we!"

"My fears, Bailey, as you see, were too well grounded. The gripping illusion and her father's cry were too much for her taut nerves. By the way, did the 'spirit' really resemble Mrs. Harrallton?"

"Very much indeed—in fact, I was rather astonished at the likeness."

"Then these scoundrels have somehow managed to get hold of a photograph. Damn the luck! I should have investigated first!"

"Never mind, old fellow, don't take it so hard. If the materialization really wasn't genuine we —."

"Genuine! did you say? My God, Bailey, you ought to have seen the rest of the circus. Why, man, spirits by the half dozen literally swarmed—young and old, male and female, fat and lean, whiskered and clean-shaved, short and tall. Actually, at one time, I counted five on parade. Oh, it was most fetching! The moment I entered the room and sized up things I knew we were in for some tall cheating. Genuine mediums always dispense with such elaborate

preparations. Lord, what a nasty mix-up! Father and daughter both spirit-crazy."

"But, my dear fellow, surely you don't doubt after what you said yesterday to Miss Harrallton she will reject your version of the fake!"

"I most certainly do, Bailey; in fact, I'm dead certain she'll need something more than words from me. Long delving in the psychology of illusion convinces me that after the experience of the evening Miss Harrallton will need the most indubitable proof of fraud, such proof as can be gained only by exposing, possibly breaking up, this gang of fakirs."

"Well, why not call in the police?"

Blondel sniffed contemptuously: "I'd as lief call in a lot of dummies!"

"Anyhow they could help you break up the —."

"I've never called in one yet, Bailey, and I'm not going to now. I got Miss Harrallton into this scrape, and, by the infernal powers, I'll get her out of it!—yes, and her gullible daddy, also!"

"All right, count me in—but what's the dope?"

Without reply Blondel proceeded to pace the

floor, his head inclined, features tense, hands clenched behind him. Knowing well his moods I dared not interrupt. For five or ten minutes he stalked back and forth like a caged beast, then unexpectedly wheeled and looked straight at me, and said, "We'll have to do it, Bailey, even if it is risky!"

"Do what?" I asked, all at sea.

"Why, break up the seance, to be sure—seize the pretty 'spirit' and hold her till the lights are turned on, incidentally running the risk, in case of failure, of being prosecuted and heavily fined."

"How dreadfully exciting!"

"There isn't any other quick way of getting even so we'll have to take the risky route. By the by, have you seen through the swindle? Do you know how that 'spirit' got into the room?"

"I really hadn't thought about it—been too much worried over personal matters."

"Carpet dark and unfigured . . . walls ditto . . . table with dark cloth . . . apparently mysterious cabinet . . . ceiling paneled."

"Yes . . . but—."

"That 'spirit' couldn't come in at the door and walk down one of the side aisles."

"Certainly not—and, since you set me thinking, my guess is the ceiling . . . Oh, I see—removable panel and a ladder!"

"Yes."

"And the room above is the rendezvous of the rascally confederates."

"Just so."

"Hellishly ingenious, isn't it?"

"The devil's very own! Fake mediums run desperate risks so at times resort to desperate means to escape detection. Suppose, for instance, a sitter were to suspect fraud and felt game enough to grab one of the 'spirits.' The outcome might be ruinous to the medium's reputation and pocket-book. In the case before us, my belief is the burly manager lurks somewhere on the carpeted space so he may sand-bag any presumptuous mortal that dares to seize a 'spirit.' In such a situation the audience could easily be persuaded, highly over-wrought as it generally is, that the blow was due to spirit agency. And, of course, if a seance were interrupted without due exposure of fraud, the dis-

turber would inevitably be arrested and prosecuted."

"Talk about skin games! It out-shylocks Shylock, doesn't it?"

"If I only had plenty of time I could join the gang as confederate, set a neat trap for the dirty scoundrels and catch every last mother's son of them. But we can't afford to wait. Mr. Harrallton is doubtless being bled to the tune of fifty or more each week, and now that your intended has been trapped—well, I'm a blatherskite if I let the sneaking lot of them impose on her another time!"

"But maybe she isn't so badly taken in as you think. Hadn't we better wait and see if she goes any more?"

"Oh, she'll be there all right, Bailey—I know too much about human nature under psychic stress to have the least doubt; and, mark it, she'll be there with her father, too. Don't try to dissuade her, rather urge her going, for the expose must take place in her presence. Be sure to notify me if she can't go Tuesday night. I shall expect you here that evening sharp at seven. Good night."

When I called next day I found Miss Harrall-ton not only recovered from the shock but in a state of bliss bordering on ecstasy. She spoke with rapture of the seance, asked me numbers of embarrassing questions, which I answered with soothing lies, sent a thousand thanks to Blondel and told me with delirious joy that she and her father could hardly wait for Tuesday. Under such circumstances it was delightfully easy to play the hypocrite and enter sympathetically into her raptures. In fact, so intense was her new faith, so charming the sweet prattle about her "spirit-mother," I found myself at times, in spite of Blondel's words and assurance, almost on the verge of forswearing allegiance and making common cause with her. However, good sense ultimately prevailed and I left her reveling in heavenly fancies.

Tuesday evening I was prompt to the minute. On entering, I was introduced to Jarvis, friend of Blondel, and associate in former exposes of fraud. Blondel's plans were brief and definite:

"Jarvis, you are to go early so as to get a seat on the front row as near the middle as possible. Keep these flash-lights where you can use them

at a moment's warning. When you see Bailey jump over the cord, press the button and keep him exposed. You and I, Bailey, must sit together. When I give the signal you are to grab the 'spirit' and hold on for dear life. I will take care of the manager, if he is on the carpet, get hold of the ladder and turn on the lights. By reason of the extraordinary success of the last seance I rather think the confederates will not be so wary tonight. Nevertheless, we must keep cool, act with precision and let no one suspect our motives. If things go as I hope, it's a cinch the 'spirit-wife' mystery will readily be cleared up."

As soon as Blondel and I could "make up" for the occasion, the trio sallied forth in high spirits. It was agreed that Jarvis should enter first, I follow and Blondel, entering last, find a seat beside me or just in my rear. As anticipated, the room and arrangements were unchanged. Fortunately, I secured a seat on the front row a little to the left of the middle. Blondel also found a place on the front row, two seats left of me. Jarvis succeeded in getting the middle seat.

As Blondel predicted, Miss Harrallton came

with her father. Fortunately, all the seats on the front row and those back of me were occupied, so they had to sit on the third row, twelve or fifteen feet to my right. She was heavily veiled. Although in disguise, I was afraid to look her way a second time for fear of suspicion, if not detection.

At a quarter past eight the seance began with the usual felicitations and stereotyped invitation to doubters. These preliminaries satisfactorily disposed of, the medium was lashed securely to his chair in the cabinet, the music box was started and the room plunged into darkness. How uncanny my situation! There I was, facing a wall of blackness, delegated to seize with profane hands what the spectators considered a blessed spirit called back from the regions of death to comfort two bereaved mortals. What if after all, Blondel were mistaken? Other men; great thinkers, distinguished scientists, experienced investigators, had staked their reputations on the truthfulness of the very phenomena I was anticipating. Why should I discredit them in favor of Blondel? What if the apparation were the spirit of my fiancée's mother? Would

she ever forgive such blasphemy? And seizing a spirit—how could the thing be done anyhow? Wasn't I playing the fool?

These sickening forebodings were suddenly ended by the appearance of a spirit-white hand that gleamed for a moment high up above the cabinet. A tense pause, and a misty-whitish vapor seemed to float upward from the floor. With bewildering quickness it took the semblance of a human form with outstretched arms, then disappeared. Followed other partial materializations, the illusion of which was perfect. At last, near the ceiling I perceived a luminous mass that slowly settled to the floor then gradually unfolded and expanded into the shadowy likeness of a woman in white. Gracefully it moved forward and paused, with arms outstretched, seven or eight feet beyond the cord. Whether it was the result of deliberate planning by the fakirs, who had managed to secure a photograph of Mrs. Harrallton, or whether a matter of subjective deception, the 'spirit' strongly reminded me of the dead woman. In fact, the resemblance was so striking I sat spell-bound, forgetting who and where I was until brought to my senses by

a pinch from Blondel. At the same instant I heard a low, pleading cry, "Mother!" With a moment's pause to steady my nerves, I leaped across the barrier and grabbed the apparition none too gently around the waist.

Quick as I was, someone else was equally alert, for just as I seized the 'spirit' I felt a heavy object graze the side of my head and descend with almost paralyzing effect on my left shoulder. Jarvis flashed his lights and at the same moment I heard Blondel say, viciously, "Take that!" Hearing a scraping noise in my rear I turned in time to see Blondel holding the lower rung of a ladder that someone was trying savagely to pull upward through a hole in the ceiling. Crash! The ladder fell to the floor as Blondel leaped for the electric switch.

What a bewildering spectacle where a few brief seconds previous a supposedly blessed spirit was holding enthralled a credulous group of men and women and lifting into the seventh heaven of yearning two suffering souls! Within the cabinet the fake medium struggling frantically to free himself from the coils of encircling rope; the burly manager stretched out on the

carpet, apparently unconscious; Jarvis standing rigid with both flash-lights extended; Miss Harrallton clinging in abject terror to her startled, disillusioned father; the audience panic-stricken; and I, the protagonist in the swiftly staged tragedy-comedy, swaying in the center of the melee holding in both arms a struggling, quivering woman robed in white, her hair powdered, her face plastered with some sort of chalky paste that made her look most frightful.

With consummate irony and grace Blondel executed the grand finale. Jumping on the table and crying "Attention!" he announced with imperturbable suavity and unction:

"Ladies and gentlemen, in behalf of Signor Clementine I desire to thank you for your presence this evening. The Signor begs me to express his regrets and to say that he finds conditions unpropitious for further spirit manifestations, so he bids you all a kind good night."

ROSE O' THE COVE

A geological freak is Harley's Cove, far back in the Tennessee Mountains. East and west precipitous walls of sandstone, a mile and a half distant at the southern base, gradually converge northward until they end abruptly, leaving an entrance seventy or eighty feet wide overlooking an extensive valley. The southern end is shut in by huge fragments of stone piled as if by giant hands to a height of three hundred feet. Bursting from this rocky mass a noisy brook rushes down the Cove and tumbles over the distant cliff a glittering cascade.

Discovered and occupied in 1808 by a band of Carolinians under "Long" John Harley, the Cove was named in honor of the brave leader, who chose a spot near the southern end as the site of his rude log cabin.

A century later John Harley, IV, still held the ancestral grant of six hundred forty acres, though long since the old log cabin had given way to a comfortable six-room cottage. Three-

quarters of a mile to the north lived Noah Bradford, second largest land owner in the Cove, and beyond him eleven families, five of them renters.

In midsummer, 1908, Rose Harley, the eldest of eight children by John Harley's second wife, was just rounding nineteen. Tall, straight as a mountain pine and lissome as the wild fawn of her native forest, she led captive the affections of the few mountain youths who claimed the privilege of acquaintanceship. While not surpassingly beautiful she was singularly attractive, the more so for a wealth of golden hair that fell in rich masses about her shoulders.

Like most of the mountain girls in remote localities Rose had received a very imperfect education. She could read, write and "figger" after a fashion—but no more. "Book larnin" had never been in great favor with the Cove elders, who cherished faithfully the conviction of their forefathers, that women didn't need such schooling. However, in her case the academic lack was partly compensated by the possession of such uncommon sense and strength of character as differentiated her sharply from the other girls of the Cove.

But for this uncommon sense Rose, like the majority of mountain lassies of sixteen or seventeen, might already have had her "man," for certainly at no time since reaching fifteen had she lacked ardent suitors. Robbed of the chance to cultivate her mind; oppressed by the weight of a monotonous life too seldom relieved by anything that fired the higher emotions; caught in the warp and weft of an existence that put a premium on early marriage—matter for wonder that something within her unsophisticated soul had prompted defiance of community precedent!

Married or unmarried, she reasoned that at best she could but look forward to a future as nearly shut off from contact with the great, richly varied world of which she had heard as was her own petty ancestral cove. Still, equating interests as best she could, she had dared to assert the right to personal freedom for a few more years; dared to give leash to the unsatisfied yearnings of her pure soul for larger contact with minds and hearts than marriage, with all it entailed, could yield; dared to demand more than a passing glimpse into that deeper realm of unselfish effort which characterizes strong natures

when conscious that the cabined lives, the low aims, the petty achievements of their fellow creatures are pitilessly circumscribed by fate. Accordingly, a half dozen suitors had already tired of the quest and sought other quarry. Two only were left—David Bradford, born and reared in the Cove, and Everett Danforth, son of a prosperous farmer in the valley beneath.

Both were strapping young mountaineers, lithe-limbed and clean-featured beyond the average. Each had the prospect of a good patrimony and was industrious. If natural advantage favored either, it was Everett, who had the handsomer face and readier wit.

One afternoon in August as Rose was returning from the only store in the Cove she sat down to rest on the roots of a huge red oak that overshadowed the road. David saw her leave the store and following shortly overtook her at the tree. Companions since childhood, there was neither coyness on her part nor constraint on his. The conversation at first was trivial, touching on the weather, the crops, the homefolks—but not for long, since David of late had been pressing

hard for an answer and realized that the present moment was not to be spurned.

"Rose," he asked tensely, "ain't you ready yit? I'm twenty-one now an' paw's a-goin' to give me the deed to seventy-five acre an' build me a house . . . that is—."

Divining instantly the reason for his pause and anxious to cover his confusion, Rose replied gently:

"I wisht I could, Dave, fer yore sake, I do—but like I told you afore, they's things in the way—I ain't ready yit."

"But whut's to hinder, Rose? All the other gals in the Cove uv yore age is done married an' got childern o' the'r own. I've loved you fer so long I cain't ricolict when hit started an' fer clost onto three year now I been a-hopin' you'd choose me so's we could git our chists an' set up housekeepin'. A body knows in reason hit's long 'nough . . . Rose, do you keer fer me? . . . Do you raly love me in a marryin' way? I got a right to know this . . . hit means everything to me—."

As he pleaded his cause with the simple eloquence of a heart long kindled by a mighty pas-

sion, Rose sat down with folded hands and drooping eyes, deeply troubled in soul. Her heart told her that she cared more for this man than for any other—nay, that she loved him. But the still unsatisfied yearning; the half-stifled cry of a soul that not yet had really lived; the budding desires that centered in the bettering of hearts and homes about her; the blind struggle between passion in a chaste young breast with ghost-like visions of home and children hovering sweet, and a brooding conception of sublime duty, shadowy but real, dimly conceived but resting firmly on the soul's affirmations—what clashing alternatives! what living, burning options!

In the midst of this agonizing strife the passionate words of David, "hit means everything to me," served instantly to crystallize her thoughts. Lifting her head and looking straight at David she said, trembling with mingled emotions:

"Everything, did you say?—I wisht to God hit meaned everything to me, too! Fer yore sake, Dave, raly and truly I do, 'cause I know you love me 'r you wouldn't 'a' waited these

three year when you might 'a' had any gal in the Cove. I ain't indiffrent an' ongrateful, Dave, 'pon honor I ain't an' please don't hold no sich idee—."

"But why do you keep a-holdin' me off?"

"That ain't fair, Dave . . . I hain't helt you off . . . I hain't ever telled you I'd marry you, an' besides—."

"But when I've axed you to marry me you al-lus say you ain't ready yit."

"An' hit's so, Dave—they's other things has got to come fust."

"Whut do you mean, Rose?"

"Hit cain't be 'xplained, Dave—leastways not now . . . hit'd take me an hour 'r more so's you could onderstand."

"Will you tell me—Friday night?"

"I reckon so."

"How long 'll hit be, Rose, afore them 'other things' is done through with? You know I been a-waitin' on you now fer—."

"Please, Dave, don't say no more," she begged in distress, "I'm sorry fer you . . . I'll tell you everything . . . you kin call Friday night at

candlelight . . . goodbye," and picking up her basket of groceries, she hurried on her way.

Mrs. John Harley, like many other mothers of large families, was prematurely aged at thirty-seven. Naturally of a fussy temperament, she had grown more querulous with the passing of years and often played the shrew. Finically exacting at times and without reason, on other occasions she indulged her children intemperately so that all save Rose were spoiled. Her hobby was routine—and never did railway magnate lay greater stress on schedule, for she literally ran her house by the clock—that is, tried—to the daily discomfiture of at least one member of the family, who always got a sound scolding.

The groceries for which Rose had been sent were needed for supper. Mrs. Harley "figgered" by the clock that Rose should return at 4:30, and when the hands of the old clock on the mantel reached the half hour and Rose had not come, she began to fidget. Five minutes passed—ten, and still she had not appeared. Irritated, Mrs. Harley threw off her cooking apron, stalked through the house and standing on the front

porch, arms akimbo, looked anxiously down the road for signs of the tardy messenger.

Presently Rose turned the corner, two hundred yards distant, walking very leisurely. Timing carefully her own movements, Mrs. Harley stepped forward so as to reach the front gate and open it a brief moment before Rose's arrival. The latter realized that trouble was brewing, but did not hurry. Snatching the basket from her daughter's arm as she reached the gate the irascible parent demanded querulously:

"Whut in the world you been a-doin' to make you so late?"

"Am I very late, mommy?"

"Yes, indeed—I been a-waitin' on you purty nigh fifteen minutes. Who'd you stop to gab with, I wonder?"

Rose turned sidewise to fasten the gate and answered without a quaver:

"I wuz restin' under the big red oak beyant Mr. Fallon's paster when Dave Bradford overtuk me—."

"I might 'a' knowed hit!"

"But he didn't stay long—jist about five minutes."

"Long 'nough, I reckon, to git atter you fer not marryin' 'im. Nineteen come last June an' not married yit! When I wuz yore age, Rose, I'd been married two year an'—."

"Yes, I know, mommy, you've telled me this a dozen times—but I ain't ready to marry yit."

"Dave'll make you a pow'ful good man—you cain't do no better, Rose, an' hit's sartinly time fer you to be gittin' ready . . . if you put off marryin' much longer you won't be able to born no children—hit's a p'int-blank fact—less'n you suffer orfully. Me an' yore poppy both thinks as how hit's high time you wuz a-settin' up fer yoreself—."

Mrs. Harley reached the front porch and turned to note the effect on Rose.

"You mean, mommy, I orter be makin' my own livin' an' not be a-burdenin' you an' poppy?"

"No, not 'xackly, child—you'r payin' fer yore raisin' all right 'cause you ain't afeered o' work, but you orter be in yore own home, Rose, a-raisin' yore own childern an' he'pin' yore man to lay up store fer the rainy days."

Rose looked up at her mother, helplessly re-

alizing that in thought and ideal a great gulf separated them, one that could not be bridged with words. "Some day, mommy, mebbe you'll onderstand," she responded gently then turned and preceded her mother into the house.

That night Rose sat long by her window meditating. The upper room, which she shared with three sisters, faced north and afforded a clear view of the towering cliffs that formed the gateway to the Cove. Through the narrow slit, in the bright moonlight, she could barely descry the outlines of a distant peak, which for her became a visible symbol of that great, unknown world of which she had so often dreamed. Only once had she crossed the border of her native county, and then for just one brief, memorable day, four years ago, when her mother had taken her to Knoxville. How lonely in spirit she felt, rebel against the dictates of her own maidenly heart, questioner of parental wisdom, challenger of age-old precedents—she, an ignorant girl, unschooled in books as in the lore of the world, to array herself against everything that sacred custom approved! Did she really have the right to kill the love of a man who for years had bided

his time? After all, dared she rob her own heart of consolations indefinably precious? Was the vision of community service she had caught a mere fox-fire, jack-o'-lantern glow or a divine gleam?

Yonder, somewhere in the mass of trees silvered by the magic touch of the full moon, stood a shabby, one-room building, the school-house, where but but for niggardly motives and ancient prejudices she might have found something far better than the smattering of knowledge vouchsafed her. Bitterness swept her heart as she thought of the wasted years of her own life, and pity mingled with gall as she pondered the dead past of other lives, shriveled, starved, cursed for lack of vision through opportunity. Fifty or more pupils soon to start grinding in the treadmill of learning—a three-month's school—perhaps—and taught by a Cove girl even more ignorant than herself! Oh, if God would but use her to end such a tragedy!

And beyond the drab school-house an even shabbier church building, where very occasionally services were held. Rose knew little about the heathen except what she gleaned from her

Bible. Were they much further from God, she wondered, than her own Cove people who were too stingy to build a decent church house and to hire a preacher for regular worship? Ought she to blame the boys for swearing and gambling and the young men for getting beastly drunk on Saturday night? Was there a hope—could she, just a grown-up girl, do anything to better the situation?

What if she tried and failed? What if the Cove really didn't want a change and called her a stuck-up meddler? What if she lost the affection of the man she loved and had to face life as an old maid—creature almost unknown in the Cove—or, to shun that, sell herself to some lonely widower whom she couldn't respect?

Wiser heads and saintlier hearts have questioned futively the sphinx of duty. Why then expect an unsophisticated child of the mountains to preempt truth? Baffled by conflicting emotions, weary in body and soul with her long vigil, Rose at last fell on her knees, clasped her hands in agony of spirit and, looking through simple faith to the God she had been taught so little

about, poured out her soul in earnest prayer for guidance.

Three days passed, days of clock-wise monotony unrelieved by incidents that lift the soul, and Friday came. After supper Rose washed the dishes, tidied the kitchen, and slipping on a checked muslin dress awaited with misgivings the coming of David. As the night was beautiful she chose to receive him in the yard under a huge white oak where a rustic seat had been built.

Twilight had scarcely ended when he arrived. "I'm mighty glad," he remarked after formalities, "we kin talk here instid o' the parlor—hit's so beautiful! . . . I wuz thinkin', Rose, as I come along the road about the moonlight ride we tuk last August an' whut you said to me on the way back. Do you ricolict?"

"I hain't fergot, Dave."

"Did you mean hit, Rose?"

"Yes, Dave, ev'ry word."

"I wisht to God you could say hit now an' mean hit!"

Rose kept silent.

"If you'd 'a' throwed me down that night,

Rose, I'd a got desp'rit an' married Jennie Peyton."

"Hit mout 'a' been fer the best, Dave, if you had—Jennie wuz a good gal."

"But she wa'n't you, Rose, an' I'd 'a' married 'er jist fer spite."

"That'd 'a' been turrible, Dave," she added with a shudder, "wher' they ain't no love hit's sinful to think o' marryin'."

"Rose," he questioned eagerly, leaning forward, "is that why you won't consint to marry me?"

Rose hesitated a moment, looking up through the shimmering trees. Presently she turned, laid her hand softly on David's and looking into his eyes said: "No, Dave, hit ain't. When I telled you I loved you hit wuz my very heart a-speakin' an' . . . hit's still a-speakin', Dave—."

"Rose!" he cried rapturously seizing her hand and squeezing it with ardor, "you raly love me?"

"Yes, Dave," she answered sweetly, without any attempt to withdraw her imprisoned hand.

The moment was too ecstatic for words—it had to be lived, so Dave kept silent, caressing

the trustful hands while his heart echoed joyously, "She loves me! She is mine!"

"But, Dave," she continued, presently disengaging her hand, "don't axe me to marry now . . . I ain't ready yit—."

"But you jist telled me you loved me," he protested warmly.

"I do, Dave; I've loved you more'n a year . . . I'm like other gals, Dave, I wants a man, an' home . . . an' childern—but they's been somethin' on my mind, Dave, fer a long time . . . seems like I cain't git shet o' hit . . . I've thought an' worrit lots . . . I've prayed, too, Dave—but hit's still thar an' if I wuz to marry you afore—."

Dizzy with apprehension Dave closed his eyes and listened as one in a trance.

"But I better start at the fust an' tell hit all as I promused. I'm nigh twenty now, Dave, an' I been goin' to school off an' on fer 'leven year—an' what am I?—jist a ignoramus . . . I kin read an' write an' figger—an' that's all . . . I don't know nothin' 'bout books an' music an'—an' all them wonderful things gals out yander in the big world knows . . . an' whut's jist as bad

—no hit's wuss, all the gals that has growed up in the Cove fer I don't know how long air jist like me—an' the boys ain't no better off nuther. Hit's a sin fer we uns to keep on bein' so ignorant—a crime I calls hit to let boys an' gals grow up to be jist as know-nothin' as the'r poppies an' mommies. Somethin' orter be done to stop hit, Dave, an—."

"You think you kin do hit, Rose?" he asked skeptically, opening his eyes and turning squarely toward her.

"I don't know as I kin, Dave," but sence nobody else ain't a-tryin' I done made up my mind to try," she answered with decisiveness of tone that awed her lover.

Dave studied a moment, feeling like one who sees the ground slipping away beneath him. To think of losing happiness when after years of searching it seemed within his grasp! His brain reeled and staggered under the blow. At length a faint hope gleamed, and he asked quickly:

"Why cain't I he'p too? I ain't much on larnin' but if we wuz married I'd—I'd—"

"You'd whut? No, Dave, hit's kind o' you to offer, but that ain't whut's needed. If I wuz

yore woman you wouldn't le' me do whut I'm minded to an' you know hit."

"Yes, I would, Rose—honest I would, if yore heart wuz sot on hit."

"An' you fergit, Dave, p'rhaps," as she lowered her eyes, "they'd be . . . childern a-comin' on."

Dave accepted the frankly sincere avowal with chivalrous silence. He didn't visualize Rose's plans fully, but he knew that when a mountain girl marries and takes charge of a home however humble, she has little time for matters outside. The solid ground seemed to have given way to quick-sands and he felt himself sinking, sinking!

"Rose," he cried in anguish, "you cain't love me much 'r you wouldn't refuse me . . . love means ev'rything, Rose, don't hit?"

"Yes, Dave, you air right . . . love does mean ev'rything, but you fergit . . . they's other sorts an' kinds o' love than we uns have fer t'other, an' to me love o' dooty seems the nighest to heaven . . . I've prayed lots about hit, Dave, I wants to do whut's right an' fit, an' . . . sometimes God seems to speak to me silent-

like a-sayin', 'Rose, marryin' ain't fer you . . . the leetle boys an' gals o' the Cove needs you' . . . Dave," she spoke with trembling voice as she grasped his arm, "I love you . . . I'd give ev'rything but my soul to make you happy, but I cain't . . . Oh, I cain't marry yit!"

Notwithstanding the thrill of her close presence Dave felt like one against whom the gates of Paradise had been shut. "Lost!" his soul whispered, "Lost!" although Rose had merely begged delay. Neither moved nor spoke—

"To give you up, Rose," at length he said resignedly, "is like givin' up goin' to heaven."

"But all I axe, Dave, is jist post-pone-mint."

"An' that means three year leastways . . . whut'll happen meanwhilst God alone kin tell!" he ended despairingly.

"But won't you wait fer me, Dave? . . . If you'd a solem' dooty laid on yore sho'ders I'd wait fer you, Dave . . . till death!" she finished, hoarsely.

"I'll try, Rose—God he'p me!" he gulped quiveringly, "Good by," and pressing her hand fervently turned homeward.

Rose sat still, brooding over events until her

mother, who had noticed the early departure, hastened in her blustering manner, to inquire the reason.

"Whut's the matter with Dave?" she questioned brusquely, "he ain't never left so early afore."

Deep in her heart Rose resented the indelicacy, but, schooled in forbearance, she replied frankly: "He wuz hurt at somethin' I said."

"Did you an' Dave fuss?"

"No, mommy, uv course not!" Rose replied, with spirit.

"Then how in heaven 'd he git hurt?"

"I jist telled 'im ag'in I couldn't marry yit."

"Rose," she rasped out scoldingly, "you air missin' the finest chancet to git a good man you'll ever see . . . you orter git over yore quare idees an' marry Dave . . . you ain't no leetle girl no more . . . wher's 'nother grown-up gal in the Cove whut ain't got her man? Me an' yore poppy'll do handsome by you, we will that—"

"Please, mommy, don't say nothin' more!" Rose begged piteously, "you cain't onderstand . . . an' you air hurtin' my feelin's . . . to-

morrow 'r right soon I'll tell you an' poppy . . . leave me now, please!"

Mrs. Harley sighed heavily and spluttering "Did I ever!" turned quickly and walked away.

Tomorrow dawned, bringing its round of scheduled duties, which, as ever, Rose neither shirked nor faced ungraciously. Evening came—and visitors, so the chance to tell her parents what lay against her heart was wanting. Another day dawned, exacted its meed of service and faded into twilight as parents and daughter foregathered on the front porch while the younger children were playing in the yard.

"Poppy," Rose began with directness, "I s'pose mommy's told you I ain't a-goin' to marry Dave Bradford, nor no other man jist yit. I feel like hit's my dooty to try to elivate the boys an' gals—they hain't had no chancet to git a rael edjication and air growin' up ignorunt know-nothin's. You know we haint never had more'n a three month school an' most year only two. Please leave me teach this fall fer the spe-rience an' axe the school board to 'lect me reg'lar teacher fer next year. I'll study o' nights an' larn fast so's I kin take the big boys an' gals

. . . Hit'll be hard but I don't keer . . . an' I won't niglect the home work nights an' mornin's. Next summer if you'll leave me take a spell at the Institoot down yander at Whitesboro I'll save my hire an' pay back soon's I kin. We jist got 'o have a eight month school so I reckin I'll hatter teach eight month fer whut they been a-pay-in' fer three—leastways till I kin prove the boys an' gals desarve better.

"We don't know nothin' in the Cove but a little readin', writin' an' 'rithmetic, raisin' craps an' hogs an' mules, an' marryin' an' havin' childern an' gran-childern . . . hit's been this way sence long afore you uns wuz borned an' hit'll still be this way atter yore death less 'n some o' we uns makes a new start. I know whut hit means to put off marryin' fer several year—'cause Dave mightn't wait fer me—but I ain't afeered to be the fust ol' maid in the Cove sence Miss June Lester's day . . . Poppy, you air a member o' the board an' hit's yore fault in parts the boys an' gals has allus had to grow up onlarnt. . . . Give me a chancet to raly edjicate 'em, won't you?"

Mr. Harley was no better, no worse than his

Cove neighbors. Four generations had dwelt in the narrow valley, each taking what its predecessor had handed down and attempting little improvement, especially in matters of church and school. Inertia is the dominant characteristic of such folk. They were aware that the boys and girls were not being even half-educated—but that had been the way of things for generations, so they merely deepened the rut. They admitted to themselves that the religious training was shockingly imperfect—but their forefathers had been content, so they acquiesced.

With ill-feigned disapproval Mr. Harley listened to Rose's declaration of independence. Conservative by instinct, materialistic to the core, the child of ignorant parents and grandparents and himself a boor, he could see little reason for his children's needing a better education than he had received as a boy. What good would it do them? They could read and write and do sums—wasn't that all a farmer needed? It was all he had, and wasn't he the most up-standing farmer in the Cove? Did other boys and girls deserve more than his own?

And to think that his oldest girl wasn't satis-

fied to do as her mother and grand-mother had done, but must up and refuse Dave Bradford, and all because she had a silly notion of reforming the Cove, when to his way of thinking the Cove didn't need reforming. What a muss he had on his hands now! . . . And Rose was so desperately in earnest!

When she had finished talking Mr. Harley left his chair, walked to the edge of the porch, disgorged a huge quid of long green and, with impressive deliberation, returned to his seat. Already Rose had detected his disapproval, but when she witnessed the tobacco episode her heart sank, for nothing short of tragic significance could ever induce her father to forego his pet habit following supper. Clearing his throat and making an effort to appear thoroughly judicial, he began:

“Sence you’ve axed me fer advice an’ he’p I’m a-goin’ to be plain. My gran’pap use to tell me when I wuz a boy to allus leave well ’nough alone an’ not meddle. Hit wuz good advice an’ I tuk to hit, Rose. We uns ain’t much on larnin’, I ’low, but we been gittin’ along middlin’ well fer ’t least a hunderd year, an’ I cal’late we kin go

on like we air a spell longer an' not be put out over hit . . . I reckon hit's true—our gals ain't never had no schoolin' to hurt, but they's allus been good to the'r man, 'ceptin' oncet in a while uv course, an' minded the'r home an' childern . . . whut else kin you axe? Too much larnin' I'm afeered 'd turn the'r haids an' make 'em stuck-up an' want 'o quit tendin' the home an' bornin' childern so's they could have a good time gallivantin' about. . . . As fer the boys, ain't they been a-makin' good farmers when they growed up? They allus find 'em a woman an' set up fer—"

"You fergit, poppy, that lots o' the growed-up boys leave the Cove—hit's heaps too small fer all o' we'uns to marry an' settle in, an' when they git down yander in the valley 'r into the big cities they ain't fitten to do nothin' 'cept hire out by the day . . . Hit ain't fair to bring 'em up ignorunt an' leave 'em go out into the big world to—"

Mr. Harley had the good sense to perceive that he could not answer the objection, so he side-stepped.

"I'm a-talkin' about the boys whut stay to home . . . them as leaves an' gits out into the

world must look out fer theyselves . . . As I wuz a-sayin', they allus finds 'em a woman an' goes to housekeepin' and raisin' childern—"

"To grow up ignorunt know-nothin's jist like the'r poppies an' mommies!" blurted out Rose.

Mr. Harley refused to be shunted from the main track, so unperturbed, continued:

"An' mules an' sheep—"

"Yes, that's jist hit," Rose interrupted again with bitterness rampant in her soul, "raisin' childern an' mules an' sheep, an' they's allus a-doin' more to improve the breed o' the mules an' sheep 'n fer the'r own childern!"

"Rose," remonstrated Mrs. Harley, "whut silly nonsense!"

"An' mindin' the'r own bus'ness," Mr. Harley concluded, imperturbable.

Rose winced under the barb, felt a keen impulse to wing by way of retort an ironic shaft, but refrained.

"Poppy," she remarked gently, "I hain't got no meddlesome notions . . . I've allus minded my own bus'ness an' not crossed yore wishes. Hit hurts to think o' crossin' you now—but, poppy, I dasent cross my conscience . . . hit tells

me I must larn the boys an' gals lots o' things they ain't never larnt yit—I got a bound to do hit, Poppy, an' I jist cain't stop . . . give me the chancet, please, . . . hit won't take much money an' I'll pay you back some day."

Mr. Harley sat stolidly silent pondering his answer. Mrs. Harley, however, with a mother's intuition, having perceived that Rose could not be checked, ended the tense situation, saying:

"They ain't nothin' else to do, John, but to leave her have her way—mebbe hit'll do some good an' she cain't do no rael harm."

For answer Mr. Harley reached in his hip pocket, pulled out his twist of long green, bit off a huge "chaw" and deliberately moved his chair near the edge of the porch, all of which indicated more surely than words that the fight was at an end. Without a word, Rose walked quickly to her father's chair and stooping, kissed him on the cheek; stepped proudly to her mother's side and embraced her, then ran to her room.

The morrow ushered in for Rose a new era, and never did Bishop survey his diocese with deeper concern than she felt for the boys and girls of the Cove. Ready consent was obtained

for her to act as assistant without salary, and eagerly she made preparations for beginning her work the following Monday week.

Dave picked up the news at the community store and therewith abandoned the last flicker of hope that Rose might recant or fail to gain her parent's consent. The early fulfillment of his dreams only an illusion! . . . How bitter the truth! For years yet no little home all his own . . . no Rose to give herself all in all to him . . . no lordship over a petty domain, which in imagination he had pictured as fondly as ever potentate his vast realm!

Could he endure the torture of months, nay, years, which to his diseased fancy seemed to project themselves interminably into the future? Some men cherishing a passion great as his might have been quite content under the circumstances to postpone for years the date of marriage—so be it, they had the privilege of remaining near the beloved and, each week, the joy that comes through personal communion of souls.

But Dave was no paragon of patience. He was restless, impulsive, eager, to settle down and follow Cove precedent. Already he had waited till

every other acquaintance of his age had married. Twittings by his cronies were becoming more frequent. His father had promised to divide the farm and build him a home—when he was really ready to marry. Now, with no prospect of marriage for several years, he must take up again the task of day laborer on his father's farm and wait, wait! . . . How he hated the word! For three long years he had done nothing but wait and again he must wait for three more years, and then—? Of course, not for a moment did he doubt Rose's constancy, but would she be ready to marry him at the end of the period? There was the rub. To his untortured mind three years seemed an age, ample for the working out of any experiment, but—

The virus of impatience was in his veins. Seeking an interview with Rose he demanded to know how long she would keep him waiting.

"I cain't say, Dave, 'xactly, but hit'll be a right smart bit—p'rhaps three year anyways, 'cause I got 'o train somebody to take up the work atter me."

Dave groaned in spirit.

"The time'll pass mighty quick, Dave, fer you

'll be busy an' so'll I. Hit'll be sweet to see you ev'ry Friday an' Sunday . . . I'm a-goin' to need encouragemint, Dave, fer I ain't cal'latin' on findin' my work like pickin' daisies . . . I got 'o study hard an' do lots o' work at home mornin's an' evenin's."

"I'll try, Rose, but hit's diff'rnt with me—I hain't got no sich work as yo'rn . . . Paw won't give me no land 'r leave me put up a house till I git ready to marry . . . hit's the way o' the Cove, you know . . . that's whut his paw done fer him, an' he won't do no more fer me."

"I'm sorry, Dave . . . hit's hard on you jist to go on workin' fer wages when you might be ownin' yore own home . . . Oh, why didn't you love some other gal!"

"No, Rose, they's jist one gal fer me . . . I'll fight hard, but . . . Rose, you hain't heered, has you, that paw's mighty put out 'cause I won't throw you down an' marry—"?

"Marry who, Dave?" Rose asked, with a tiny twinge of jealousy.

"Oh, jist any good gal 't 'll have me. He says I wuz a fool fer waitin' three year on you an' I'll

be a—but I better not say hit—if I waits three more.”

“Poor Dave!” Rose sighed, with an aching heart, “I love you fer hit all—but hit’s a tradegy fer you . . . Dave . . . I . . . won’t hold you to no vow if you—.”

“Please, Rose, don’t talk o’ no sich nonsense . . . jist love me an’ he’p me fight hit out . . . I ain’t as brave an’ strong as you . . . I git so discouraged . . . you’ll ha’ to incourige me more’n I do you.”

“I will, Dave, dear,” she replied, tenderly, laying her hand in his.

Autumn came and passed—for Rose, swiftly as the morning mist when touched by the sun; for Dave, slowly as the melting of winter snows. Christmas week, the one season that brought together in gay festivity all residents of the Cove, was but a recent memory when Dave and Rose, on New Year’s eve, took a moonlight sleigh ride. With woman’s intuition Rose of late had divined that all was not well with Dave—yet she dared not voice her fears. That night he seemed unusually pensive so she exerted herself to make the conversation cheery.

On the way home Dave brought matters to a head.

"Rose," he began with abruptness, "I got somethin' to tell you tonight . . . hit's not pleasant, but I cain't put hit off no longer . . . I'm a-goin' to leave the Cove day attar tomorrow."

Rose's heart thumped violently.

"I've fit hard, Rose, an' you've he'ped me 'r I couldn't a stood hit this long . . . Paw's down on me . . . I cain't seem to please 'im 't all . . . he's mad I reckon 'cause I won't do as he says 'bout drappin' you . . . Last week we nigh come to blows . . . they ain't no work much now to tell uv an' paw he won't give regular wages . . . I orter be makin' an' savin' all I kin so I done decided to go to Chattanooga an' work in the foundry wher' Jim Flemming's got a job . . . Hit's like death to leave you, Rose, but me an' paw'll be purty sartin to come to blows if I don't git away soon—."

"Dave," she said, trembling with prescient fear, "this is turrible! Cain't you manage to make on with 'im? Dave, I . . . don't want you to go . . . I'm afeered somehow . . . some-

thin' dreadful 'll happen, Dave, I kin feel hit right here," laying her hand over her heart, "don't go, please . . . stick hit out . . . mebbe yore paw'll quit addlin' you atter a bit."

"I hain't got no hopes, Rose . . . furthermore, hit'll be jist wastin' time, wages is good in Chattanooga . . . I kin make four time whut I'm gittin' under paw . . . I'll save all I kin, Rose, ag'in the time we sets up housekeepin'."

"I—but mebbe hit is best, Dave . . . leastways I hadn't orter be selfish 'cause you didn't raise no objection when I tuk the school work . . . I'll miss you, Dave—lots—but you'll come back to see me soon, won't you?"

"Course I will, Rose—nothin' kin keep me away."

"An' write to me?"

"Sartinly."

"An' I'll write to you, Dave, ev'ry week."

"You better!" he replied, inclining his head in a mock threat.

Briskly the horses turned the corner and sped down the road toward the front gate, two hundred yards distant, the crude runners crunching the frozen snow.

"Rose"—Dave spoke with strained emotion—

"I ain't cal-latin 'to see you no more . . . won't you . . . kiss me?"

The sleigh came to a stop in the shadow of a big chestnut tree.

"Yes, Dave, sence you'r goin' away," and leaning over she gave her lover a kiss, chaste as the snow about them.

Rose stepped out of the sleigh and extended her ungloved hand. "Good by, Dave," she said, sweetly feigning a smile.

"Good by, Rose," he answered, huskily, almost crushing the warm hand trembling in his.

Then for the simple maid who had chosen to follow the gleam came still more laborious days and toilsome nights. Until the session had closed early in December she had acted as assistant without pay. Now to the all-day grind of class work were added the responsibility of principalship supplemented by the unlightened domestic chores and the nightly studies in self-culture, which too frequently were prolonged into the morning hours.

Had father and mother but accorded a generous sympathy, the path of duty, rugged and

steep for one so inexperienced, would have unfolded visions of an earthly paradise, whereas at times she seemed to glimpse far off a lonely golgotha. Not once, however, did she shrink from the task her soul had set or breathe a word of complaint.

Long since, Everett Danforth had conceded to Dave Bradford the inside track. Still, with the tenacity that love engenders in some souls he refused to abandon the quest. Other girls somehow failed to interest him deeply, while Rose Harley stirred his soul to the quick. When Rose told him frankly about her plans, making no mention of David, he dared to flatter his vanity with the conviction that his rival was losing ground. Early in January when the news of David's departure reached him he felt the insurgent joy of one who, long baffled, foreglimpses sure success—for his was the nature that calculates, schemes, quietly bides its time. Had Rose returned his affection and promised to marry him after her testing of plans, he would have given ready consent even though the delay spanned years.

Somewhat better educated than David, he was

still crude in speech, although livelier in conversation. Rose always enjoyed his company, and for this reason, while careful to make clear the state of her affection, avoided such a rebuff as would have severed further intercourse. In turn, Everett, though denied the status of accepted lover, dared to hope, believing that so long as no formal engagement existed between Rose and David he need not despair. Patience, accordingly, became his ruling passion.

For several months after his rival left the Cove Everett very artfully avoided real love-making. What was the use since Rose was pledged for at least three years to community service and no Dave Bradford was on hand to supplant him? "Be patient!" his soul kept urging, "the time is not ripe for action."

Winter at last gave way to Spring and March winds whistled down the Cove. Through the long, dreary months Rose never faltered, although discouragements were many and sympathy at home still scant. Dave's letters brought cheer and comfort, and her own detailed answers afforded unconsciously a most beneficent outlet

for her surcharged feelings. In one of them she wrote frankly:

"Yes I still love you Dave and miss you orfully and some days I git so discourigd but if hit all had to be done over why I reckon we ud be jist wher we air now."

April came with alternation of balmy sunshine and fitful showers and Rose looked forward eagerly to the close of school. Friday afternoon as she dismissed the noisy crowd of boys and girls and started homeward she was overtaken by Everett, who explained that he was in the Cove on business for his father. Never before had he asked to walk home with her so she had no ground for refusal, although, exhausted in body and mind, she felt little inclination to talk.

"Bet you'r mighty glad when Friday atternoon comes," he challenged quickly, after receiving permission to accompany her.

"Yes indeed!"

"How many young varmint's did you have to whup this week?"

"Nary one—I don't have to whup 'em."

"Huh?" skeptically. "Whut'd you do to 'em then?"

"I didn't do nothin' . . . they wa'n't no need . . . I reckon they appreshuate whut I'm a-givin' 'em fer nothin'."

"Hit's sartinly quare . . . down in yan school wher' I use to go the teacher he wore out a big bundle o' switches ev'ry day. . . . I guess hit's 'cause you air larnin' 'em, Rose . . . you allus did have fetchin' ways with folks."

"Ah, quit yore blarneyin', Everett!" she chided, secretly pleased nevertheless with his compliment.

"Hit ain't no blarney, Rose, hit's the truth I feel to tell you," he declared solemnly.

"Do you tote the stun round in yore pocket?" she bandied smilingly.

"No, but"—growing genuinely serious—"I do tote somethin' heavier'n any stun right in here," laying his hand on his heart, "Rose," he continued pleadingly, notwithstanding he noted on her flushed chek a look of disapproval, "I hain't said nothin' fer months about lovin' you . . . hit's been hard to keep still 'cause when you love you jist want 'o speak right out an' tell hit . . . I ain't axin' fer no answer now, Rose, I know you've sot yore mind on this here school bus'ness

an' which you ain't a-goin' to turn yore back on hit till hit's finished . . . I kin wait, Rose, if hit's three year 'r five jist so they's a chancet to—."

Rose was so taken aback by the unexpected turn in conversation she listened to Everett's pleadings as one in a dream until recalled by his request for assurance of a chance, then the poignant thought of what the interview was unfolding swept over her like a hurricane . . . Her sacred vow given to an absent lover, and now she stands listening without protest to the burning words of his rival! What unfaithfulness! Would Dave forgive if he knew that even for one moment such words had gone unchallenged?

"Everett," she cried, turning toward him a face from which the blood had gone, "fer God's sake don't . . . hit's blasphemious! . . . P'rhaps I orter told you, Everett, I . . . I love David Bradford . . . but I s'posed you knowed hit. Dave an' I hain't quar'led—his Paw didn't have no reg'lar work an' he's gone to Chattanooga wher' he's gittin' big wages . . . but he's comin' back an'—."

Pallid as that of the girl he had loved and lost,

Everett's countenance registered blank despair as he paused thereby interrupting Rose.

"Fergive me, Rose," he begged piteously, "I didn't know you wuz ingaged 'r I wouldn't 'a' spoke. . . . I . . . I wish you happiness . . . good by!" and turning, he walked swiftly away.

Two weeks later when school ended the Cove tendered Rose such formal expression of thanks as repaid her fully for all the work and sacrifice endured. Feminine comment on the occasion reflected quite clearly the state of public opinion:

"Looks like hit's the beginnin' o' better days fer our boys an' gals," said appreciative Mrs. Jim Leighton.

"My oldest boy, Jed, he says she's the peertest teacher he ever seed," seconded Mrs. Joe Whately.

"I allus knowed she wuz a fine gal," chimed in Mrs. John Bentley, "but she sholy has went beyant my ixpectations."

"Yes, mebbe that's so," croaked hide-bound Mrs. Rafe Campbell, "but jist the same I say she orter married Dave Bradford fust—she's sottin' a bad 'xample to t'other gals an' which'll depopilate the Cove if we don't take keer!"

"Hit will that," piped in Mrs. Bob Hatfield, "a gal's fust dooty is to her husbunt an' children."

"Fiddlesticks! that's whut's been the matter with we uns fer clost on to a hunderd year," bitterly retorted Mrs. Bill Jarrett, the mother of ten children, "I say hit'd be a big sight better fer the Cove if we had a few spunky ol' maids!"

"The gospel truth, shore!" warmly approved Mrs. Tom Starrett, the mother of eight strapping youngsters whose father for years had kept the family living from hand to mouth.

"Well, atter all ol' maids ain't so very ondesirable," cheeped pious Mrs. Lon Parrott, "thinkin' o' them an' the'r ways keeps a body humble."

June swept through the Cove with a pageant of riotous green and Rose, refreshed by a few weeks of rest, began zestfully her summer work at the Institute. For the first time in her life she came in contact with educated folk and found the joy of sitting at the feet of inspiring teachers. How wonderful it all was! How drab, in comparison, her own previous existence! How empty her head! How starved her soul!

With all the power of a resolute nature she

hurled herself at tasks appointed and self-created. Progress for her was no orderly process—it was measured by leaps and bounds. Her letters to Dave and to the home folk were crammed with expletives, surcharged with a perfervid zeal that confounded their cherished opposition and generated a secret pride. However, enthralled as she was there was no forgetting the fact that Dave's promised visit had never materialized. To her repeated inquiries he gave evasive answers that her simple, trusting nature readily accepted. "I reckon," she consoled her heart, "he's savin' the money fer the home."

A few quiet weeks at home and the fall term began with Rose in full charge. Busy but uneventful days passed with Thanksgiving at hand—yet no visit from Dave. "He'll sartinly come fer Christmas," she told her mother in answer to the latter's inquisitive nagging.

Early in December Dave wrote, after a lapse of three weeks, that he had a new job and was going the following week to Birmingham, where he could get still better wages in the steel mills. Of course, he wouldn't be home for Christmas. For the first time suspicion invaded her heart.

The effect was frightful, although she fought bitterly against harboring such an idea. "Mebbe I'm misjudgin' 'im," her heart prompted, "p'r-haps he's got some reasin he cain't tell me now. . . . I'll jist wait a spell an' make shore."

Christmas came and with it a simple remembrance from Dave—but no letter. A new year dawned without any message of love and good wishes. Another week charged with dire forebodings dragged through and the letter for which her soul had been hungering arrived. It contained glowing descriptions of Birmingham and the steel mills, but lacked the sweet tenderness, the inestimable words of endearment to which she had been used.

The letter was handed to her at the close of the day's work. She read it sitting at her rude desk in the bleak little school house and, stunned by the revelation of a dying love, sat immovable, she knew not how long, her hands clasping the letter, her eyes staring at vacancy.

"So hit's true as I been fearin'—he don't love me no more," she communed heroically with her heart, "an' wants to throw me down gent'le. . . . Well, I reckon hit's my fault . . . he's

been a-waitin' fer three year an' jist couldn't hold out t'other three . . . P'rhaps some purty gal with fine close an' fetchin' ways has sot her spell on 'im. . . . I been so tuk up with my school mebbe he thinks I've—no, he couldn't . . . Oh, I didn't know how much I loved 'im till I up an' lost his love! . . . Well, I hain't nothin' else to live fer an' work to'ards 'ceptin' my boys and gals. . . . The Lord ha' mercy on me!"

That night in a spirit of tender forgiveness she wrote:

Dave I been fearin fer a long spell you was chillin yore letters aint had the sweet things you use to write me and this here last one jist lets me down easy-like I haint got no blame to make Dave you was willin to marry me I low and waited three year fer me an which is more en I desarved cause marryin is naeteral fer a man an if you caint wait three more year why they aint nothing fer us to do but quit but Im all tore up over hit Dave I still love you an aint never gogin to love no other man its turrible to think you count be my man an we wont never live in the hole home but I hope you forgive me if I done you wrong good by.

David sent in reply a very weak apology, but accepted the inevitable without protest. The truth is, for several months, like many another unsophisticated mountain youth caught in the tangled skein of city life, he found the witchery too captivating. In comparison with the smartly dressed young women he met in the parks and the ball rooms, free in manners and scandalously frank in speech, Rose suffered appreciably after the first two months of absence. Struggle he did and valiantly, against the glittering sorceries—but in vain. Why condemn him? Sturdier spirits than his, under like conditions, have bowed to defeat though sworn to keep eternal faith. Lovers as true, for the sake of passion's baubles have strangled chaste affection and turned base deserters. Once started on the "primrose path" his descent was easy. No need to trace it in sordid detail, for every city has its thousands of such derelicts, wastrels, lost souls, fallen angels destined by the inevitability of their own misdeeds never again to regain the heights.

For Rose, the months that lay ahead held but a single purpose—the giving of herself body and soul to community work centering in the school.

With one of the two great passions that had animated her suppressed, the other quickly took such dominance as circumstances easily made possible. Yet like all heroic spirits that dare to be different from the masses about them, Rose wore bravely her crown of thorns. When no longer it was expedient to keep from her parents the knowledge of David's infidelity she came in for the sort of cheap tongue-lashing the "I told you so" parent revels in.

"Uh, huh! you would sow the wind," her mother began raspily, "so now you'r reapin' the whirl-wind. 'Pears to me you might 'a' knowed no likely young feller 's a-goin' to wait on a gal ferever—they's too many handy gals around. . . . Whut kin you 'xpect atter three year is up . . . take some snivelin' wido'er with four 'r five childern 'r jist drap into a ol' maid? A purty sight you got ahead o' you, I must say, an' you oncet the peertest gal fer courtin' in the hull Cove!"

Mrs. Harley paused magisterially to note the effect of her words. Rose, who sat between her father and mother in front of the old-fashioned fire place, appeared untouched by the censure.

"I cal'late atter this," her father chimed in autocratically, "you'll be more beholden to the idees o' yore betters. We warnt you if you didn't take keer you'd lose Dave Bradford. . . . Wher' you goin' to find—?"

"Poppy, you an' Mommy talk as if they wa'n't no other marryin' man a-livin' 'cept Dave Bradford. . . . If I didn't love Dave I could marry Everett Danforth tomorrer," Rose retorted in pique.

"You better do hit whilst you got the chancet," admonished the mother.

"Yes, you had that," reiterated the father, "fer atter three year you'll be mighty nigh a ol' maid—an' who'll want you then?"

"Hit wont make a speck o' diff'rince, Poppy, fer I don't never intind to marry now," Rose asserted with spirit, "I love Dave yit, an' allus will . . . an' sence he throwed me down I've sot my mind on bein' a ol' maid, which if nobody likes hit they kin jist do as they please . . . I cal'late I won't have to be beholden to you, Poppy, much longer nohow."

"You really mean, Rosie," her mother asked with real solicitude, "you air seriously thinkin'

you won't never marry nobody?"

"I do that!" she answered emphatically, "they hain't no plum disgrace in bein' a ol' maid . . . an' b'sides I ain't a-goin' to marry no man jist to be marryin'."

"Sakes alive! I ain't never heerd the likes afore," sighed Mrs. Harley resignedly, "my own flesh an' blood gal a-sottin' her haid p'int-blank to be a ol' maid! . . . The Lord 'a' mercy on us!"

"You'll change yore idees a right smart I opine," commented the head of the house cocksurely, "when hit comes time to rack out fer yo'-self . . . the three year ain't up yit!"

"All I axes, Poppy, is you jist wait an' see," Rose replied sweet-spiritedly.

For the remainder of the session she sought in a quickening of academic effort the balm a stricken soul needs. Suffering chastened a spirit already beautiful; and renunciation of vows so dear to the heart of every young woman gradually bred a nun-like gentleness of manner, a sweet unselfishness that made her ten-fold beloved.

Early in March Everett heard the news, but had the good sense to keep quiet. Summer came

and with it another leavening term at the Institute. In the interim between Rose's return to the Cove and the opening of the fall session Everett met her at a barbecue and artfully managed to draw her out of the crowd.

"Rose," he began abruptly realizing that time was precious, "I've heerd how Dave done you. . . . I'm pow'ful sorry . . . hit's a shame! an' I know you must 'a' suffered turrible. . . . Don't feel put out with me, Rose, fer tellin' you ag'in . . . I've loved so jist as long as he did an' ain't I been waitin' too? I could 'a' married other gals—but you know why I hain't. . . . Rose, I don't expect you to now, but cain't I hope some day you'll larn to love me? . . . I'll wait if hit's five year."

Less than human Rose would have been not to feel deeply touched by such an avowal. Perhaps the poignant memory of her own crushed love prompted a quicker sympathy with one who for years had remained faithful against heavy odds. Her reply was tenderly considerate!

"Everett, I've allus respected an' liked you . . . you've been a rael man, an' p'rhaps if I'd 'a' knowed you sooner 'r seed you of'ner things

'd 'a' been diffrint . . . Dave's broke my heart, Everett . . . I hain't nothin' else now to live fer 'cept to larn the boys an' gals to git a better edjication 'n the'r poppies an' mommies enj'yed. We uns must n't gang along year atter year like the ignoramuses we air . . . hit's a crime which them whut's been responsible fer hadn't orter 'petuate . . . Mebbe—hit mout be that way—the Lord he jist hatter raise up a deliv'rer frum the bond uv ignorunce same as he raised up Moses to lead the Childern o' Isr'el outen Egypt . . . If Dave hadn't throwed me down, I reckon I'd 'a' stuck hit out fer two 'r three year in the school an' then got married. Now hit's all changed . . . 'pears like the Lord he's a-humblin' an' a-chastenin' me fer to lead the boys an' gals outen the Egypt o' ignorunce."

Rose's answer was so steeped in conviction Everett felt resistance was useless. One thing, however, he must know for his own future peace of mind.

"Rose," he daringly asked, "do you still love Dave atter the way he's treated you?"

The indelicate words touched motor centres that instantly gripped her heart and left her face

bloodless. For a moment she hesitated, looking straight into Everett's eyes. Tremblingly she said:

"You orter not 'a' axed me that, Everett . . . but I ain't ashamed to answer plain out. Yes, I love Dave yit an' I 'low I'll keep on lovin' 'im till—"

"Till whut?"

"I'm dead," she answered with quiet firmness.

Everett had expected a very different reply so felt abashed. Nonetheless he would have liked to prolong the conversation, unfruitful though it was, just to be near the woman he loved, but, seeing two of Rose's friends approaching, he hurriedly asked:

"May n't I come to see you sometime, Rose?"

"No, Everett, hit's not best now," she answered firmly, then turned to greet her friends.

Eight years passed, wonderful years for the boys and girls of the Cove—years that witnessed the erection of a new school house and church, with the maintenance of regular worship, and the gradual elimination of academic ignorance. Rose spent her summer months in Normal School work, and long since had come to know the mean-

ing of culture. Gradually the quaint dialectic usages of earlier days slipped from her. Contact with the outer world brought ease and assurance and that refinement of manners so foreign to Cove society. Occasionally through the years came echoes of Dave—but no letters. Long since she had abandoned hope of ever seeing him again, although in heart she cherished tender memories of the handsome youth who loved her so ardently and for whose ill-starred career she held herself in a measure responsible. What if she had forfeited ambitious scruples and married him? Would a happy home, children, a devoted husband have proved full compensation for what destiny instead had brought her, and through her, every family in the Cove? If tomorrow she could stand where she stood almost nine years ago, would her choice of life options be different?

There were times in the earlier, crowded years when conscience played the Devil's Advocate and cross-questioned her mercilessly. Life seemed cheated of its sweetest hopes, its most precious fruitions, and the sacrifice she had made anything but a "sweet-smelling savor" in the nostrils of the unregenerate Covites. Often

when the mother-instinct gripped her she dreamed of a tiny bit of warm flesh nestling in her arms, and on awaking to stark reality in a dark, cheerless room felt poignantly the irony of existence. Days there were when an indefinable restlessness, a blind reaching out of the soul in all directions, a feverish longing for something she knew not what, swept over leaving her weak and listless. Once when in the home of her girlhood chum she saw three rosy-cheeked children romping merrily and a wee thing cuddled close to the mother's breast, she fell a-crying and had to leave the room.

And yet, suppose she had married Dave? What of her culture and the vistas it had opened? Did it atone for a dense ignorance glorified by husband and children? And the Cove? Would it have been better to "let well enough alone," to see the rut grow deeper, the ignorance increase? Would the bright-faced boys and girls whom she had taught to reverence knowledge have been just as happy, and the next generation offer promise as fair?

As the year's lengthened the arch spanning the interim since she made the great renunciation

time, that best solvent of troubles and perplexities, dealt very gently with her. Loved and respected more and more each twelve-month, she entered quietly into that coveted heritage of good will which only the truly noble in soul attain, while the memories of earlier days, sweetened and hallowed by myriad uplifting experiences, seemed like beautiful old canvases richly framed and hung where the light ever plays on them softly.

During the first years of the great European War when our own country was slowly being sucked into the maelstrom of international strife, existence in the quiet Cove was almost unruffled. Echoes of great battles lost and won, of titantic forces engaged in mortal combat, drifted in and formed the staple of gossip at the community store and post office. But when the United States accepted the challenge of Germany and entered the lists, the Cove soon learned the bitter meaning of war, for the draft pressed into service eighteen stalwart youths, among them three brothers of Rose. Thenceforth the daily papers reached the Cove to be tremblingly scanned by mothers, wives and sweet-hearts fearful of read-

ing in the casualty lists the names of absent loved ones.

A Red Cross unit was organized and under Rose's direction rendered efficient service. To her every one in the Cove looked for counsel and about her as centre revolved every phase of community activity. Mothers sought her for consolation; wives of the drafted men came for comfort and advice; and sweet-hearts of the boys in camp or in the over-seas trenches shared with her their letters, assured of a most sympathetic and animated response.

When the Influenza swept over the country exacting its toll of precious lives, the Cove did not escape. Three sons were sent home for burial in native soil, one of them Rose's favorite brother. It was at such moments that the greatness of her spirit was in evidence. Death had no terrors for one who had already mastered life. With sublime fortitude she bore her own grief losing sight of self in her beautiful devotion to other stricken hearts.

In March, 1918, the Cove had a genuine thrill. On the front page of the paper was a list of names of nine men cited for distinguished brav-

ery in action, and heading the list was the name of "David Bradford of Harley's Cove, Tennessee." As Rose read the simple account of the decorations gratefully bestowed by two Governments the embers of an old smoldering love burst again into flame and she wept for joy. How sweet to know that the man whose image she had kept in her heart many years, the man who had in bygone days thrown away his nobler self in part, had regained the forfeit and was now a world-hero! Until that day she did not know that Dave was in the ranks, although she had hoped of late he had enlisted and might find in the fires of war the purification of purpose and effort that would redeem his mis-spent years.

The news set the Cove mightily agog. For days nothing else was discussed, and when a newspaper man from Nashville arrived with camera outfit and notebook, despatched to secure pictures of David Bradford's parents and of the house in which he was born, the Covites crowned themselves with the wreath of immortality. Comment on the man whose name had scarcely been mentioned in public the past six years was altogether roseate!

"I allus knowed he'd come out right atter all," vouchsafed Deacon Bill Jarrett as he sat on a nail keg whittling a piece of cedar.

"Yes, he sartinly wuz a peert young feller —'bout the best in these parts I reckon," seconded the store-keeper, Jim Leighton, in the act of weighing a sack of potatoes.

"I ricolect," reminisced Tom Starrett, renter on Mr. Bradford's farm, "oncet how he caught a young bull by the horns an' throwed 'im down when the varmint was a-makin straight fer a red apern his Mommy 'd put on."

"An' I haint fergot the time," interjected Lon Goforth, crossing his legs comfortably on the counter, "when he crep out on the ice in Joe Whateley's pond an' drug Joe's boy outen the water."

"He mout 'a' been a lettles wild atter reachin' Chattanooga—all youngsters has got 'o sow the'r wild oats—but I bet my Durham bull-calf to a chaw uv terbacky he's done come out o' the kinks," challenged Alf Stewart, Chairman of the School Board, surveying the little circle, right to left, from his seat on a covered pickle barrel.

"Right ye air, Alf," asserted Sandy McGregor, slapping his knee lustily, "I wouldn't give a whoop for a young feller whut did n't drink a drap now an' then, shake a leg at the bran dances an' spunk hit up to the gals right smartly!"

Two more months—and another thrill shot through the Cove. John Bradford received official notice from the War Department that his son had been seriously wounded, and at his own urgent request was being invalided home.

"It cain't be true!" bitterly protested the Cove, incredulous that its hero had been shot down by the Huns, "ther' must be two Dave Bradfords."

And for Rose—what tense, rackingly anxious days and nights! "He's coming home . . . a physical wreck . . . badly wounded . . . Oh, Dave, Dave! . . . I must forgive the past and nurse him back to health!" she cried with anguished soul, and with the resolution came inward tranquility bringing sweet visions of hopes suppressed. . . . "I will love him back to strength . . . he too, will forgive the past and together we will realize our dreams of early days . . . the little home will be built and I will furnish it out of my own savings. . . Oh, I will

love him so dearly and make all amends for the bitter years that are gone!"

Quickly sped the days filled, as they were, with thoughtful preparations and relumed by sweetest fancies . . . And then came the crudely improvised ambulance. At the gate of the Bradford home strong arms took up the cot and bore it tenderly into the little room where David Bradford had spent a happy youth.

"You here, Rose?" a weak voice asked in astonishment as the woman he had forsaken knelt by his cot.

"Yes, Dave, of course!" was the cheery reply, as a soft hand stroked his fevered cheek and smoothed back the brown hair tousled by the summer breezes.

"Maw, how could she do hit? She must be a angel," the thin voice whispered to another woman kneeling opposite.

"Yes, Davie, our Rose o' the Cove is a angel—an' more—but you mustn't speak none now . . . you need rest . . . atter you sleep some you kin talk to 'er. . . . O my poor, brave boy!" and a broken-hearted mother laid her cheek against the emaciated cheek of her son and wept

tears of mingled honey and gall until Rose quietly intervened and restored her to calm.

"Try to sleep now, Dave, won't you?" Rose pleaded, leaning over the cot.

"If you'll set by me an' hold my hand," came the feeble answer.

Quickly Rose brought a chair, and sitting down clasped in her own the thin right hand that lay listless on the coverlet. Presently tired lids closed over deep-sunken eyes and sleep came.

For Rose there was nothing to do save sit quiet and think, think, think! What a transformation! Could this shrunken form lying so still beside her be the same that a few short months previously had hewed its way to martial immortality? Could this shell of a man actually be the stalwart Dave Bradford of her youth? Those flushed, sunken cheeks . . . the flat chest . . . the labored breathing . . . the paroxysm of coughing . . . the thin, quivering nostrils "Death!" they seemed to whisper to her hoarsely. "No!" thundered her heart in direct protest, "that sha'n't be . . . he must be brought back to health . . . there's too much to make atonement for . . . too much to live for . . . I can't

give him up now after all the weary years of waiting . . . we've both been cheated out of love . . . robbed each other . . . now we understand and can live, live! . . . Oh, God in heaven, I've given up everything else in life that was selfishly dear . . . spare me this shattered wreck of a man . . . he still loves me and this love mated with mine will redeem the lost years of youth. . . . Oh, give me skill and strength to win him back to health!"

Thus in agony travailed the spirit of the patient watcher as the clock in the adjoining room ticked off the minutes. An hour passed and the thin hand still nestled where love had placed it. A half hour—and Mrs. Bradford brought in a shaded lamp. Ten minutes later—a rigor that convulsed the wasted frame—the eyes half-opened in semi-darkness and a weak voice cried:

"Nurse, I just dreamed Rose was here!"

"And she is, Dave, look—this is Rose and you're in your own home," she answered leaning near.

A smile of joyous recognition—a whispered "Rose!" and the drowsy eyes closed again in sleep.

Through the long hours of the night Rose kept loving vigil, having insisted that Mrs. Bradford save her strength for the morrow. Dave slept fitfully. Spells of labored breathing alternated with paroxysms of coughing until Rose wondered how the frail body could endure it. Whenever his eyes opened, instantly they fastened on her as if to make sure he was not dreaming.

At daybreak Mrs. Bradford relieved Rose. Later, when Dave awoke his eyes anxiously swept the room in search of her who had become the guardian angel of his dreams. Divining the reason, Mrs. Bradford hastened to assure him: "Rose is comin' back, Davie, she set up with you all night an' must git some rest."

Impatiently mother and son bore through the day, one crushed utterly in spirit, the other racked with suffering and tortured by the absence of her whose love he had betrayed but who had shown herself so Christ-like in forgiveness. Not once had he dared hope that Rose would be awaiting him and the joy of seeing her brought the most ecstatic moment of his life. "How could she forgive me?" he kept asking himself during the day. "Does she still love me atter all my

treachery, or is she jist sorry fer me and wants to help mother?" His brain was too sick for any consecutive thinking, but between spasms of hard breathing and coughing he thought only of her and yearned feverishly for the hour that would bring her back.

At five o'clock his restlessness increased. "Maw," he questioned, impatiently, "ain't she comin' soon? I cain't rest till I talk to 'er about somethin'."

Shortly before six Rose entered smilingly. "And how is my hero-patient this afternoon?" she asked cheerily, taking her seat by the cot and stroking his hand.

Instantly the sick man's face was transfigured. For the moment he forgot his sufferings, forgot everything in the immeasurable joy that Rose had come and was sitting near caressing him.

"Hit's so good in you to come!" he answered, ignoring her question, the light in his deep-sunk-en eyes kindling afresh, "but I'm a cur and don't deserve it."

"Hush, Dave," she said sweetly, laying a hand softly over his mouth, "you must n't talk that way . . . the past's dead . . . forgiven . . .

we must turn away from it to the future and through love make atonement."

"Love!" How strangely the memory of that word so tenderly spoken by her years ago reverberated in his soul . . . Rose talking to him of love after he had ruthlessly betrayed her confidence! . . . Had she really forgiven the past? Did she love him still? Could any woman be noble enough for such Godlike act? Doubt must be dispelled . . . he must know the truth . . . the certainty of what she had said would be heaven!

"Rose," he asked looking into her eyes with unnatural wistfulness, "do you . . . can you . . . still love me?"

The fountains of the great deep within her soul were broken up, the inhibitions of long years were released and, transfigured with joy, she dropped to her knees, caught David's hand between her own and pressing it fondly to her cheek said:

"Yes, Dave, dear, I've loved you every day since you left the Cove ten years ago."

"O my God, if I'd only knowed hit!" wailed a

poor soul that too late found itself shut out from an earthly paradise.

"But you know it now, Dave . . . Love means everything, you told me once, and we must prove it after all our mistakes."

"It's too late, Rose, too late! . . . O God—" and a paroxysm of coughing racked him till Rose began to fear he might slip away from her and "go west."

When the coughing ceased and breath sufficed, he whispered hoarsely, his eyes filled with tears: "It's too late, Rose . . . I've come home to die . . . my lungs is all shot away!"

"Dave!" gasped Rose, icy fear closing about her heart, "it mustn't be . . . you've got to get well . . . think how much we have now to live for!"

"Yes, Rose, I know and I wisht I could . . . O God, I do! . . . but I'm done for . . . the Huns got me that last time," he added despairingly.

"But, Dave, you just must fight to get well."

"If there'd been a fightin' chance Rose, the doctor 'd never let me leave the hospital."

"But the doctor don't always know, Dave," she still protested, although hope was frozen.

"An' soon as I knowed they wa'n't no chance I begged 'em to le' me come home so's I could die an' be buried here in the Cove—."

Rose's spirit was too crushed for further protest. All she could do was clasp his hand lovingly and listen.

"Hit's worth all I've suffered, Rose, to find you ag'in an' to know you ain't been hatin' me all these years, but fergivin' an' lovin' me . . . hit's almost too wonderful to believe!"

Weakness overcame him and he lay quiet for several minutes while Rose gently rubbed his forehead and wrists.

"They's somethin' else, Rose, I got to tell you," he continued weakly, "onpleasant as it is to both of us . . . I hain't no thought of excusin' myself . . . I was jist a dam fool and a measley coward to treat you so mean . . . the city turned my head an' women an' whiskey ruined me. . . I went plum to the dogs an' was too 'shamed to think o' comin' home . . . then the war broke out an' they drafted me. . . I was down an' out so it didn't make no diff'rince . . .

but atter a few months I braced up . . . Uncle Sam made me walk straight an' afore I reached France I made up my mind if ever the chance come to me I'd play the man fer oncet in my life—."

"O, Dave," Rose interrupted, her face once more aglow, "you don't know how proud we all are of you! The whole Cove just worships you!"

"I'm glad," he answered, without a touch of vanity, "especially fer yore sake, Rose, 'cause I was thinkin' o' you the night I crossed 'No Man's Land' an' drapped down into the trenches—."

"Oh, you must tell me all about it sometime!" she cried gleefully, her face beaming with pride.

"An' to know you're proud of me helps a bit to wipe out all those ugly memories. . . "Oh, Rose, if God'd only let me live now with you to love me I could make a man o' myself yit!"

"You are a man, Dave, a real man—you've proved it!" she affirmed with true soul ardor.

"Not yit, Rose . . . not yit . . . but if you could finish what Uncle Sam begun I'd rank A1 some day . . . Rose . . ." There was a pause as the tired man gasped for breath, "do you re-

member the last moonlight ride an' . . . what you gave me afore we said good by?"

"Yes, Dave, how could I forget?"

"Will you . . . kiss me ag'in . . . on the cheek?"

Rose knelt by the cot, pressed her cheek for a precious moment against his own gaunt cheek, then kissed him tenderly. "And now," she said rising, "you mustn't talk any more . . . you're tired . . . it's time to go to sleep."

Tranquil in soul for the first time in years, without a word he placed again his shriveled palm in the warm hand of Rose and, like a tired child, quickly fell asleep.

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